











# MILTON

## L'ALLEGRO & IL PENSEROSO

### TEXT

With Introduction, Critical Remarks, Analysis,  
Copious Explanatory Notes, Paraphrase, Explanations,  
Model Questions with Answers,  
University Questions, &c. &c

—:—

### EDITED BY

Some distinguished Graduates (European and Indian)  
of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge,  
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*The Publishers.*

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# INTRODUCTION.

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## **'Life of John Milton.**

Milton's life, says Pattison, is a drama in three acts, for it naturally falls into three distinct periods. The first extends from his birth, over his education and travels, to 1640 the second from 1640 to 1660, the period of Puritan ascendancy in England, and the third and last from 1660 to his death in 1674 the era of *Paradise Lost*

### **I First period, 1608-1640**

This again may be divided into

#### *(I) Pre-College Period, 1608-25*

Born in London, 1608 His father, a pious and cultured man, a London scrivener, Studied in Saint Paul's School Very studious Learnt Greek, Latin, French Hebrew and Italian Could already write verses

#### *(II) College Life, 1625-32*

Entered Christ's College, Cambridge where he studied 7 years taking his M. A. degree in 1632

*Works* —Latin Pieces, On the Death of a Fair Infant (1st poem in English), Christ's Nativity Miscellaneous pieces and one or two Sonnets.

#### *(III) Horton Life and Travels, 1632-40*

Lived in his father's country-house at Horton, chiefly occupied with the study of Greek, Roman, Italian and English literatures which stimulated and ripened his genius

*Works* —L'Allegro (Lyric) Il Penseroso (Lyric) Arcades (Mask) Comus (Mask). Lycidas (Elegy) Italian Sonnets

## II Second or Civil War Period, 1640-60.

Took a leading part in the Civil War. A Puritan and Parliamentary. Married a Royalist lady, 1643. Unhappy union.

Latin Secretary to Cromwell. Blind in 1652. Married again, 1656. Married 3rd time 1664.

*Works* -- Areopagitica (English prose). Many prose pamphlets. English Sonnets. Latin pieces.

## III Third or Epic Poem Period, 1660-74

Under arrest for a short time at the Restoration,

*Works* -- Paradise Lost (Epic). Paradise Regained (Epic). Samson Agonistes (sacred drama).

Died, 1674.

For a detailed life of Milton and a chronological list of his works, see 'Model Questions and Answers' at the end of the book.

## Milton as a poet

Milton is the greatest name in English Poetry after Shakespeare. He is generally classed with Elizabethan poets, for though he flourished half a century later, his grammar and idiom bear a close semblance to those of Elizabethan Literature. So little was Milton appreciated by his fellow countrymen, that he received for his great Poem, which perhaps stands highest among the productions of English poets, only five pounds. The first who directed the attention of Englishmen to the splendid merits of their countryman, was Addison, and since his time, Milton has ever ranked with the great Epic poets, the Greek Homer, the Roman Virgil, and the Italian Dante. Less original than the first, less polished than the second, less imaginative than the third, Milton

will yet not suffer from comparison with his great rivals, and we may well excuse whatever of exaggeration is found in the famous lines of Dryden —

"Three poets in three distant ages be  
Greece, Italy and England did add  
The first in loftiness of thought surp  
The next in majesty in both the l  
The force of nature could no farther go  
To make a third, she joined the former two

### **Genius lyrical—not dramatic**

Macaulay has truly said that Milton's genius is lyrical, not dramatic. His lyre will only echo real emotion, and his imagination is only stirred by real circumstances. 'The mere play of fancy with the pretty aspects of things could not satisfy him, he wanted to feel beneath him a substantial world of reality. He had not the dramatist's imagination which can body forth fictitious characters with such life-like reality that it can, and does itself, believe in their existence. Those who have been thought to succeed best in engrafting fiction upon history, Shakespeare or Scott, have been eminently human poets, and have achieved their measure of success by investing some well-known name with the attributes of ordinary humanity such as we all know it. This was precisely what Milton could not have done. He had none of that sympathy with which Shakespeare embraced all the natural and common affections of his brother men. Milton, burning as he did with a consuming fire of passion, and yearning for rapt communion with select souls, had withal an aloofness from ordinary men and women, and a proud disdain of common-place joy and sorrow. This want of interest in common life disqualified him for the task of revivifying historic scenes.'

### **Style and Diction.**

'Milton has acknowledged to me' wrote Dryden 'that Spenser was his original.' But he had studied in fact all the master minds

that went before him— Beaumont, Fletcher, Burton, Drummond, Ben Johnson, Shakespeare, the whole splendid English Renaissance, and behind it the Italian poetry— Latin antiquity and the fine Greek Literature. The result was a brilliant and composite style—a combination of two elements, ancient and modern, classical and Elizabethan. His syntax and idiom are closely analogous to those of Elizabethan writers. But his classicism is still more marked. Not only are his ideas, images and epithets tinged with the 'added charm of classical reminiscence', but Latinisms and Græcisms (constructions in imitation of Latin and Greek idioms) abound in every page of his writings.

## Characteristic Excellences and Defects of Milton's Poetry.

### Excellences.

1 By far the most prominent and important feature of Milton's poetry is its *Sublimity*. "His mastery of the sublime" is wonderful and has received the most frequent and emphatic laudation. No poet has yet been able to approach and far less, equal him in loftiness of conception.

2 Another characteristic of his poetry is the *remoteness of the associations suggested*. "Its effect is produced, as Macaulay has pointed out 'not so much by what it *expresses* as by what it *suggests*,'—not so much by the ideas which it directly conveys, as by other ideas connected with them."

3 Another and by no means the least distinguishing feature of Milton is what has been called his *power of poetical utterance*. His command over language in its beauty and majesty, his mastery

of form and verse, his dominance over all persuasion and stress and sustainment of sound, its music and loveliness, its dignity, austerity and awe - these form according to a famous critic—the most marked distinction of Milton

4. Noblest purity in every thought, zeal for religion and virtue, noble purpose and high morality

5. Philosophic thought and artistic spirit

6. His love of Music, architecture and other fine arts is an important element of his genius. "As nature had endowed him in no ordinary degree with that most exquisite of her gifts, the ear and the passion for harmony, he had studied music as an art, and had taught himself not only to sing in the society of others, but also to touch the keys for his solitary pleasure." His style is everywhere dominated by his mastery over the effects of music, and his works are full of expressions of his love for it (*vide* L. Allegro ll 136-150 ll P, ll 151-166). It influences his choice of words, his choice of a particular form of a word, and even his pronunciation. It explains many of those inversions so common in his poetry, it accounts for his use of alliteration and for the form of many of the compound epithets that he coined so freely; it heightens the charm of his songs, and above all, it has enabled him once for all to stamp the character of English blank verse well" - Bell

7. His laborious striving after perfection of workmanship which accounts for the flawless perfection of his rhythm and diction. In this respect he is as admirable as Virgil or Dante. No one else in English literature and art possesses the like distinction.

### Defects

1. Harsh inversion, ellipsis and frequent obscurity.
2. Use of obsolete words and expressions and his peculiar use of words

- 3 Use of foreign idioms (Latin, Greek and Hebrew)
- 4 Pedantic and Piquant manner arising from his devotion to classical literature and his religiousness which never made him a popular poet
- 5 His long digressions as in the Epics
- 6 Want of humour
- 7 Want of knowledge of and sympathy for the everyday thoughts and feelings and doings of ordinary men

## Critical Remarks

ON

## L'Allegro and Il Penseroso

### Titles

The titles *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are Italian and may be literally translated as 'the cheerful man' and 'the Melancholy man'. But it is evident if these two poems are carefully examined, that the respective characteristics of the speakers are by no means what we should call mirthful and melancholic. There is, in fact very little of mirth in *L'Allegro* and very little of melancholy in *Il Penseroso*, in the sense in which these two words are used in English. Milton probably chose the Italian words not so much because they exactly expressed the characteristics of the two men represented, as because they were less likely to lead to misconception of his meaning than the words 'Mirth' and 'Melancholy'. Some commentators—Pattison, Garnett &c.—have taken exception to the title '*Penseroso*' on the ground that 'there is no such word as '*Penseroso*', the adjective from '*Pensiero*' being '*Penseroso*' and that even had the word been written correctly, its signification is not

that which Milton intended, *i.e.* 'thoughtful' or 'contemplative,' but 'anxious' full of cares 'carking.' Verity points out that these critics are wrong on both points through ignoring the difference between modern and earlier Italian, the word 'penseroso' being a current form when Milton wrote this poem and meaning what he intended it to mean *i.e.* 'musing' 'meditating.'

### Date

These two poems were written after Milton had left Cambridge, during his six years' residence at his father's house at Horton, in Buckinghamshire -- that is between 1632 and 1638.

### Origin

There can be little doubt that Milton drew some suggestions for the leading idea of his two poems from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and from a song in the play of *The New Valour* which play was not printed till 1647, two years after *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* were printed and many years after they had been written, but the song had probably been composed and known very many years before the appearance of the play in which it was inserted. It is said to have been written by Beaumont, Fletcher's great co-worker who died in the same year as Shakespeare, 1616.

### Ideal-pictures

"Some commentators maintain that the poems were composed at Forest Hill, near Oxford, on the ground that the scenery in that neighbourhood corresponds more nearly with that delineated in the poems, but as neither Horton nor Forest Hill furnishes all the various details of the scene described it is more natural to suppose that the poet had no one particular locality in his mind's eye when he wrote them. There is no occasion, therefore, to try and localise

the pictures portrayed in the two pieces. they are ideal rather than local pictures, they are the ideal day of two men of different moods and pursuits " "

### Priority.

Perhaps *Il Penseroso* was written first. Beaumont's Song in *The Vice Valour* suggested it and then the counterpart was written. "Not unseen" in *L'Allegro*, (l 57) must have been written after the "unseen" of *Il Penseroso* (l 65)

### Subjects

'The one celebrates the charms of "Mirth," the other those of "Melancholy. The advocate of Mirth bids Melancholy begone to the realm of Darkness, bids "heart-easing Mirth" come to him with a retinue of kindred spirits, he would fain hear the lark singing and enjoy all other cheery sights and sounds of the bright morning-time; he would be present at the merrymakings of the village and listen to its marvellous tales, he rejoices in the life of the town—in all its gay gatherings, he goes to see great comedies acted, above all things he would be surrounded by the sweet singing of exquisite verses. On the other hand, the melancholic man will not allow "vain deluding joys" to be near him, he bids Melancholy hail, and she is to bring with her a fitting company, his pleasure is in the song of the nightingale, in walks beneath the moon, in the sounds and in the quiet proper to the night, in calm studies through its watches—readings of philosophy, of poetry, of high romances; the night is the season he loves, when it must end, let the daybreak be cloudy and rain-dripping, when the sun at last will shine out, let some undisturbed grove screen him from its blaze; there let him slumber, to wake with sweet music in his ears; let him oft times pace some old Gothic cathedral, and listen to rich anthems; at the end, let him pass away his years in some peaceful hermitage, still gathering wisdom."

### Contrast.

"The two characters are, perhaps most sharply distinguished in respect of sociality. The one is eminently social, he delights to associate with the "kindly race of men." The other likes better to be left with his own thoughts, with no human intrusion. The one is light-hearted, the other not of sad but rather of a grave spirit. The eyes of the one look outward, and brighten at the sight of the fair image of nature, the eyes of the other rather look inward, at the fine forms which the mind can present. Both the characters delight in music, but there is fitting difference (i) in the kind of music chosen, and (ii) in the effect. L'Allegro prefers "soft Lydian airs," music of a sweet melting description, intricate and skilfully performed, while Il Penseroso loves the rich tones of the Cathedral organ, and "full-voiced choir." L'Allegro expects music to "lap him against eating cares" and to lull him to sleep, while Il Penseroso wishes to be awakened from his mid-day nap by music from an unknown source, and expects the sacred music to "dissolve him to ecstasies."

### Milton's sympathy.

"There can be little doubt as to which of the two characters Milton portrays was after his own heart. He portrays L'Allegro with much skill and excellence, but he cannot feign with him the sympathy he genuinely feels with the other, into his portrait of 'Il Penseroso' he throws himself, so to speak, with all his soul. He is indeed not altogether at home in the poem describing the former; he distinguishes the sweet-briar from the eglantine, whereas they were one and the same, larks do not visit even poets' windows to say good-morrow, but rather "singing ever soar and soaring ever sing;" he had never seen, it is believed, barren-breasted mountains, and generally we think that the wings of his Mirth are somewhat

constrained in their flight. But in the other poem his whole nature appears. The limits in point of length previously sufficing, are now exceeded. He cannot content himself with so brief a description of his "Melancholy" as of "Mirth." He refers no less than thrice to music, his darling delight. He refers at length, to the studies that were always for him of supreme interest—amongst them to the works of Spenser, whom, as he told Dryden, he regarded as his poetical father. He is charmed by the nightingale, to which bird on another occasion he addressed a sonnet. He gives several hints which he afterwards expanded in his greater works. And he proposes at the close of *Il Penseroso* a life that which he ever aspired after as the glorious maturity of his own—that he should

"Attain

To something like prophetic strain."

for it was a poet of the Hebrew sort—a *rates*—that Milton was ambitious to be.

### Characteristics.

✓

Both *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are laid out on the lines of the accepted pastoral fiction, they offer exquisite touches of idealised rural life. The two idylls breathe the free air of spring and summer, and of the fields round Horton. They are thoroughly naturalistic, the choicest expression our language has yet found of the fresh charm of country life, not as that life is lived by the peasant, but as it is felt by a young and lettered student, issuing at early dawn, or at sunset, into the fields from his chamber and his books. All rural sights and sounds and smells are here blended in an ineffable combination. The idylls are marked by a gladsome spontaneity which never came to Milton again. The delicate fancy and feeling which play about *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* never reappear, and form a strong contrast to the austere imaginings of his later poetical period. These two poems have the freedom and frolic, the

natural grace of movement, the improvisation, of the best Elizabethan examples, while both thoughts and words are under a strict economy unknown to the diffuse exuberance of the Spenserians. The choice of images is so judicious, their succession so rapid, the allusions are so various and pleasing, the leading distinction of the poems is so felicitously maintained, the versification is so animated, that we may place them at the head of that long series of descriptive poems which the English language has to boast.

### Relation with 'Comus' and 'Lycidas' ✓

It is interesting to consider *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* in relation to their sister poems, *Comus* and *Lycidas*, as marking the successive phases in the development of the poet's mind. In *L'Allegro & Il Penseroso*, Milton's mind is in suspense between the two great parties that then divided England, Cavalier and Puritan, typified by Joy and Melancholy, whose claims are evenly balanced. In *Comus* this balance inclines and Milton makes his choice, Joy is now in his eyes associated with Vice, and Melancholy with Virtue. The puritan element so patent in *Comus*, becomes still more pronounced in *Lycidas*.

### Metre. ✓

The ten introductory lines in each poem differ from the remainder very markedly in point of metre. The latter consist of iambic octosyllabic couplets. But the ten opening lines are alternately of six and ten syllables, (i.e.) of three and five iambic feet respectively, the five rhymes in this portion are arranged as follows  
(i) 1, 4, (ii) 2, 3, (iii) 5, 10, (iv) 6, 7, (v) 8, 9

✓ **Nature in the two idylls,**  
 AND  
**Milton as a poet of Nature.**

'The fidelity to nature of the imagery of these poems has been impugned by the critics

"Then to come, in spite of sorrow,  
 And at my window bid good-morrow."

The skylark never approaches human habitations in this way, as the redbreast does. A close observer of things around us would not speak of the celandine as twisted, or of the cowslip as wan. These and other such like inaccuracies must be set down partly to conventional language used without meaning, the vice of Latin versification enforced as a task, but they are partly due to real defect of natural knowledge. Milton had neither the eye nor the ear of a naturalist. At no time, even before his loss of sight, was he an exact observer of natural objects. It may be that he knew a skylark from a redbreast, and did not confound the dog-rose with the honeysuckle. But he had never acquired that interest in nature's things and ways, which leads to close and loving watching of them. He had not that sense of out-door nature, empirical and not scientific, which endows the *Angler* of his contemporary Walton, with its enduring charm, and which is to be acquired only by living in the open country in childhood. Milton is not a man of the fields, but of books. His life is in his study, and when he steps abroad into the air he carries his study thoughts with him. He does look at nature but he sees her through books. Natural impressions are received from without, but always in those forms of beautiful speech, in which the poets of all ages have clothed them. His epithets are not, like the epithets of the school of Dryden and Pope, culled from the *Gradus ad Parnassum*, they are expressive of some reality, but it is of a real emotion in the spectator's soul, not of any quality detected by keen insight in the objects

themselves. This emotion Milton's art stamps with an epithet which shall convey the added charm of classical reminiscence. In

"To behold the wand'ring moon,  
Riding near her highest noon,  
Like one that had been led astray,  
Through the heaven's wide pathless way,  
And off, as if her head she bow'd,  
Stooping through a fleecy cloud" (Il P., ll 67-72)

the moon is endowed with life and will, "stooping" "riding" "wand'ring," "bowing her head, not as a frigid personification, and because the ancient poets so personified her, but by communication to her of the intense agitation which the nocturnal spectacle rouses in the poet's own breast. In these two idylls nature is not put forward as the poet's theme. Milton's theme is man in the two contrasted moods of joyous emotion or grave reflection. He has recorded a day of twenty-four hours. But he has not registered the phenomena; he places us at the standpoint of the man before whom they deploy. And the man joyous or melancholy is not a bare spectator of them; he is the student compounded of sensibility and intelligence, of whom we are not told that he saw so and so, or that he felt so, but with whom we are made copartners of his thoughts and feeling. Description melts into emotion, and contemplation bodies itself in imagery. All the charm of rural life is there, but it is not tendered to us in the form of a landscape; the scenery is subordinated to the human figure in the centre.

Milton's attitude towards nature is not that of a scientific naturalist, nor even that of a close observer. It is that of a poet who feels its total influence too powerfully to dissect it. Man is to him the highest object; nature is subordinate to man, not only in its more vulgar uses, but as an excitant of fine emotion. He is not concerned to register the facts and phenomena of nature, but to convey the impressions they make on a sensitive soul. The external forms of things are to be presented to us as transformed through the heart and mind of the poet.

### ✓ **Milton, Gray, Cowper, Wordsworth compared as poets of Nature**

Milton's had neither the eye nor the ear of the naturalist. At no time was he even an exact observer of nature. His references to nature, therefore, are not always accurate. In *L'Allegro*, he distinguishes the sweet-brier from the eglantine, whereas they are one and the same. He makes the sky-lark approach human habitations though larks 'do not visit even poets' windows to say good-morrow, but rather "singing ever soaj and soaring ever sing." Milton is essentially a man of books and sees nature with the eye of a scholar. His theme is *man*, and nature is introduced only as a background to the pictures of human life and as an excitant of fine emotions.

Gray describes natural scenery with a minuteness unknown to Milton, but like Milton, uses the description of nature only as the most graceful ornament of his poetry. He is not a lover of nature for her own sake. The visible landscape,—the sea—the sky and all that men feel in contact with them have no attraction for him. He never makes nature his subject. His theme is man and in the '*Elegy written in the Country Church-yard*' and in the '*Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*' natural scenery is introduced with reflections on human life and used to point its moral.

Cowper is the first of the poets "who love Nature entirely for her own sake. Even when a boy, 'no bard could please him but whose lyre was turned to Nature's praises.' A careful observer of Nature and her ways, he describes every thing that he sees around him with a minute accuracy—an intense realism—which forms one of the special charms of his poetry. His description of nature excites *sensation* rather than *ideas*; for, he does not go so deep as Wordsworth in his survey of Nature. He describes, indeed, her outward aspects with a loving fidelity, but he cannot see into the life of things. He paints *only what he sees*. The wisdom and benevolence of God is the only spiritual lesson that

Nature teaches him. At the same time, he is not, like Thomson, content with merely describing her picturesque effects, but often strikes into a meditative strain and 'hears the herbs and flowers rejoicing all', and no doubt, we find in him the dawning of that meditative spirit which was to receive its full development in the hands of Wordsworth and Shelley.

Wordsworth's view of nature is entirely different from that which poets had held down to his time. Other poets occasionally borrow from Nature, for purposes of embellishment or of moral teaching, but with Wordsworth, Nature is the beginning, the middle and the end of his poetry, - his 'all in all'. He is, in the words of Mr. Ruskin, the keenest-eyed of all modern poets for what is deep and essential in nature. The most commonplace object of Nature is to him a source of highest inspiration. To quote his own words:—

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

He closes his little poem 'Nutting' with an assurance that *there is a spirit in the woods*. Nature had, he thought, one living soul which, entering into flower, stream, or mountain, gave them each their own life. Between this spirit in Nature and the Mind of Man there was a pre-arranged harmony which enabled Nature to communicate its own thoughts to Man, and Man to reflect upon them, until an absolute union between them was established. This idea made him the first who loved Nature with a personal love, for she being living, and personal, and not only his reflection, was made capable of being loved as a man loves a woman. He could brood on her character, her ways, her words, her life, as he did on those of his wife or sister. Hence arose his minute and loving observation of her and his passionate description of all her life.

Milton's attitude towards Nature differs widely from that of Wordsworth. Milton is never a minute observer of nature, nature is not with him, as with Wordsworth, his 'all in all,'—the very life and essence of his poetry. Hence we have not in him that minute and microscopic observation of nature, and that passionate brooding on her ways and life which constitutes the peculiar charm of Wordsworth's poetry.

# ANALYTICAL TABLE SHOWING THE STRUCTURE OF THE POEMS TO BE EXACTLY PARALLEL

	<i>L'Allegro</i>	Lines	<i>Il Penseroso</i>	Lines
1.	Execration of loathed Melancholy	1-10	Exclamation of "vain joys	1-10
2.	Invitation to 'heart-easing' Mirth	11-24	Invitation to "divinest" Melancholy	11-21
3.	Allegorical parentage and companions	25-40	Allegorical parentage and companions	22-34
4.	The Morning song	41-50	The even Song	55-76
5.	Abroad under the Sun	...	Abroad under the Moon	55-76
6.	Night and the stories told by the fireside	90-110	Night and the lonely study of the mysteries of Nature and of the great stories of the Poets	77-120
7.	L'Allegro social	117-134	Il Penseroso solitary	121-154
8.	His life set to music	135-150	His life set to music	155-174
9.	Acceptance of the mood if it be this	151-152	Acceptance of the mood if it be this	175-176

# **L'Allegro.**

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**TEXT  
&  
NOTES.**

## THE ARGUMENT.

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**1-10** L'Allegro bids Melancholy be gone and betake himself to the dark caves of Hell whence he sprang

**11-24** An invocation to Mirth—her parentage

**25-36.** A poetic description of Laughter and other accompaniments of Mirth

**37-56** L'Allegro longs for the companionship of Mirth and her crew—description of rural sights and sounds in the morning—the song of the Lark—the cock-crow—the sounds of the huntsman's hounds and horns

**57-68,** A description of rural out-door life in the morning—the ploughman's cheerful whistle in the glorious sun shine—the milk-maid's song—the mowing with the scythe—the shepherd counting his flock

**69-80** Description of the bright rural landscape at noon—espying towers and battlements—the residence of some wealthy fashionable handsome lady

**81-90** Description of rural life in the cottage, their savoury dinner of herbs and other country dishes served out by the 'neat-handed' shepherdess—rural occupations

**91-99** Description of rural holiday enjoyments

**100-16** The delights of the hearth in the evening—the young men and girls seated round the hearth, telling stories of fairies and ghosts, while the cup of 'spicy nut-brown ale' goes round

**117-34.** The refined pleasures of city life—the brilliant scenes of the Theatre

**135-50.** The delights of Music

**151-2** Conclusion—the poet expresses the wish to make Mirth his life-long companion if she can bring him such pleasures



## Analysis of L'Allegro (lecture notes)

Lines — 1-10 — L'Allegro banishes melancholy out of sight.

" — 11-13 — " Welcomes the goddess of mirth.

" — 14-24 — " describes the parentage of mirth.

" (24-16) (a) according to Greek mythology.

(17-24) (b) " " a new conception.

" — 25-36 — L'Allegro describes the companions  
and attendants of mirth viz. jest, jollity,  
merriment, smiles etc. and, particularly 'sweet liberty'.

" 37-150 — L'Allegro describes the several enjoyments  
which he expects, if he becomes the votary of mirth.

(a) Enjoyments from life in the Country:

(41-52) (i) in the first part of the morning.

(53-68) (ii) " " (later " " " "

(69-80) (iii) " " forenoon.

(81-90) (iv) " " afternoon (up to about 2 P.M.)

(91-99) (v) " " latter part of afternoon. (after 4 P.M. or so)

(100-116) (vi) " " evening (up to about 7 or 8 P.M.)

(117-134) (b) Enjoyments from life in the City.

Commencing from after evening (after 7 or 8 P.M.)

(135-150) (c) Enjoyments to be found at all times and places  
from the strains of Lydian music.

(151-152) L'Allegro resolves to be a votary of mirth  
if it is in his power to give him these enjoyments.





# L'ALLEGRO

HENCE, loathéd Melancholy,  
Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born  
In Stygian cave forlorn  
'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy!  
Find out some uncouth cell  
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings  
And the night-raven sings,  
There under ebon shades, and low-brow'd rocks  
As ragged as thy locks,  
In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell

5  
10

## NOTES

ON

## L'ALLEGRO.

### (The praises of Mirth or joyousness).

*L'Allegro*—An Italian word—The cheerful man (pronounced *Alargro*) This charming little poem, like its sister poem *Il Penseroso*, is one of the earliest pure descriptive lyrics in the English Language. It draws a vivid picture of *the bright aspects of Nature and the joys of an ideal day spent by a cheerful young man such as Milton himself was in his school days*.

**LL. 1--10.** *The cheerful man bids Melancholy be off, and hide itself in the dark caves of Hell whence it sprang*

1. *Hence*—Get thee hence, off with thee, depart, used as verb; other adverbs similarly used are —‘away’, ‘on’, ‘off’, ‘down’, ‘up’, &c. Notice they are used only in the imperative mood

*Loathed*—Abhorred, contemptible, despicable, loathsome,—an instance of ‘ed’ for ‘able,’ a common peculiarity with Elizabethan writers

*Melancholy* — Lat 'black bile', (Lat —Fr *melan* black, and *chol*is, bile) which was supposed to cause mental depression. Hence the cause has come to be put for the effect, and the word now means 'mental depression', 'dejection of spirits'. Cf. *cholera*, *cholera*, and also *bilious*.

2 *Of Cerberus born* — The offspring of the horrid, hellish three-headed Dog Cerberus (abled to guard the gates of Hell) and its wife, Midnight. This genealogy is of course Milton's own invention, the spouse of Night in Gr. mythology being *Lelaps* and then offspring, *Ether* and *Hemera*, while Cerberus has no issue. But, as the student will find as he reads more of Milton, he is a good deal too fond of mythologising on his own account. The account he gives of Myth in lines 17-24. But he is always very happy and appropriate as here. By describing Melancholy as the offspring of the hellish Dog Cerberus and Midnight, the Poet implies that it has its origin in a fact associated with all that is low, dark and unholy, — as opposed to *Myth*, which is associated with all that is noble, bright and pure.

3 *Stygian and foul* — Dismal or desolate cavern in gloomy Hell. *Stygian* — Hellish. Adj. from *Styx* (a Gr. word hardly meaning *Hell*) one of the four rivers flowing round Hades or Hell, 'The flood of deadly Hate', P. I. II. 577.

*Fortune* — Deserted.

4 *'Amongst sights* — Amidst all the horrors of Hell — all its hideous loathsome sights and sounds. Mark the *Appellation* in, "Shapes, shrieks and sounds."

*Unholy* — Impure, sinful — as belonging to Hell.

5 *Unorth* — Dismal horrid, but 'unknown', *orth* being the past put form of A. S. *cerian* to know, as a past tense form it still survives in *could*. The word now means, 'strange', 'out-of-the-way', 'queer', 'grotesque' and sometimes, ugly.

6 *Where brooding Darkness wings* — Which is totally enveloped in dense gloom or darkness. *Darkness* is represented as a huge bird covering the cell with its dark wings, scrupulously shutting out all light. *Brooding* — over shadowing, covering over with wings out-spread — like a bird hatching its young, (A. S. *brid*, a young one, from *bredan*, to keep warm, hatch, the root of *breed*). Observe, the word has a secondary reference to the *brooding sullen habits* of a thoughtful man. *Jealous wings* — wings jealously or scrupulously shutting out all light. Observe the veiled reference to *jealousy* or *suspicion* which always goes hand in hand with *melancholy*.





7 *Night-raven*—an ominous bird whose croaking was believed to forebode ill, as it hovered over houses infected, or about to be infected, with plague and other deadly diseases—hence associated with ‘Melancholy’ Cf. *Macbeth* 1. 5

“The *raven* himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan”

8 *Ebon shades*—dark shadows of trees with dense foliage. *Ebon*—dark, black,—like the Ebony tree Cf. *Comus*, 1. 133.

“Stay thy cloudy *ebon* chain  
and *Venus and Adonis*, 1. 948

“Death’s *ebon* dart”

So Spencer has ‘Trees of bitter gall and  
*Hebon* (ebon) sad’ *Fairie Queene*, II, 7. 52

*Low-browed*—with their brows or tops hanging low, closely overhanging or projecting downwards befitting

9 As *locks*—which are as rough and shaggy as the masses of dishevelled hair clustering round thy head. The poet means to say that there is a striking harmony or fitness between the shaggy, dishevelled locks of Melancholy’s hair and the rugged rocks in the midst of which he is to dwell

*Rugged*—rough, rugged. A *rag* literally is anything ‘shaggy’ or ‘hairy’

10 *Chimeræan*—Gloomy. the Chimeræans were a mythical people described by Homer as living in the farthest regions of the Western Ocean in perpetual mist and darkness. They are *not* the Chimeræi from whom the Crimea and the Cymru (Welsh) took their name. The epithet intensifies the darkness or gloomy nature of the abode to which he dooms Melancholy

*NB*—“The student should note by what means, in the first ten lines of the poem, Milton creates so repugnant a picture of Melancholy that the reader turns with relief and delight to the representation of Mirth which follows, these means are—

1 Accumulation of words conveying association of horror, *e.g.* blackest Midnight, cave forlorn, shrieks etc.

2 Imagery that intensifies the horror of the picture, *e.g.* Stygian cave, brooding Darkness &c.

3. Irregular metre, the rest of the poem being in octosyllabic couplets whose tripping sweetness pleases the ear”—*Bell*.

But come, thou Goddess fair and free,  
 In heaven yclept Euphrosyne,  
 And by men, heart-easing Mirth,  
 Whom lovely Venus at a birth

14

**ll. 11-40**—An invocation to Mirth. Having bid good-bye to Melancholy and doomed it back to the dark dreary and dismal regions of Hell, its proper abode, the cheerful man hurls with delight Mirth on Gaety and invokes its blessings and goes on to describe its origin, character and accompaniments.

This portion (except ll. 17-24) is quoted *in extenso* by Addison in his Essay on 'Laughter and Ridicule' in the Spectator as embodying 'in a joyous assembly of imaginary person a very poetical figure of Laughter'.

**11** *Fair and free*—graceful, a very favourite combination with the poets of the last century. Free—liberal kind-hearted.

**11-16** *In Heaven born*—called Euphrosyne by the Gods in heaven, and Mirth (Joy) which brings ease and comfort to men's hearts by men on earth. Euphrosyne in Gr. mythology is the twin sister of the other two graces, *Aglaiæ* (Glow or Brightness) and *Thalia* (Bloom, Freshness) all three of whom were presented to Bacchus, the God of wine and revelry, by Venus the Goddess of Love. This is again a departure from common mythological tradition according to which the Graces three twin sisters are represented as the daughters of Zeus, though by which Goddess it is not certain. In Masks, the Graces often appeared on the stage as attendants of Venus—which probably suggested the idea that she was their mother.

*Yclept*—called. Past Part. of the old verb 'clepe,' to call.

The *y* is a corruption of the old past participle prefix *ge*. In early English the past participle of strong verbs was formed with the prefix *ge* and suffix *en*. In German, the participles are still formed by prefixing *ge*. Hence we learn that English and German had a common origin. Latterly this *ge* gave place to *y*, as, *ycladd*, *yaun*, *ytallen* &c. This old form of the participle is very common in Chaucer and Spenser.

**13.** *Heart-easing*—easing the heart of melancholy.

Cf. *heart-rending*, *soul-stirring*, *ear-piercing* &c.

**14.** *At a birth*—at one birth. 'a' = one. Cf. *Othello*, II. 3, 42 :  
 "Though he had twinned with me both at a birth"





With two sister Graces more 15  
 To ivy-crown'd Bacchus bore  
 Or whether (as some sager sing)  
 The frolic wind that breathes the spring

15 *Two sister Graces* - Aglaia and Thalia

16 *Ivy-crown'd* - Bacchus the God of Wine and Revelry is usually represented as wearing a crown of Ivy Cf. *Comus* l. 55

"His clustering locks

With ivy berries wreathed

17-24. *On whether debonair* - Here Milton gives another probable account of the origin of Mirth describing her as the daughter of Zephyr or the West Wind and Aurora or the Dawn - In plain English *cheerfulness is best produced by the early freshness of a summer morning*.

17 *On song* - According to some wiser poets. This account being purely Milton's own the '*sager*' who sings this origin must refer to Milton himself.

*Sages* is another reading for *sager*. But *sager* is the reading usually given and accepted. The meaning is 'some more learned poets have written'. So far as is known however it cannot be ascertained to whom the poet here refers. Perhaps he meant himself, and chose this modest way of recommending his own mythology.

*Sager* - Wiser bards. *Sing* - have it in their poetry.

18 *Frolic* - An Adj. = 'frolicsome,' sportive, playful.

*Breathes* - gives breath or life to - enlivens, vivifies, freshens.

Zephyr, with Aurora playing,  
 As he met her once a-Maying— 20  
 There on beds of violets blue  
 And fresh-blown roses wash'd in dew

19. *Zephyr*—same case with 'wind' above,—'The sweet and gentle west wind

*With.. playing*—enjoying himself with Aurora—the goddess of dawn

20 *As a-Maying*—as he fell in love with her while she was enjoying the May-day festivities,—alluding to the various games, and amusements which were so common, and still obtain, in several parts of England early in May. It was the custom with young girls to go out early in the morning on the 1st of May to gather flowers—the fairest of them being Queen of May. *a-Maying*—lit. 'on-Maying' i.e. in the act of enjoying the May-day pastimes; 'a' is corrupted from 'an' which again is a dialectical form of 'on'. Cf. 'a-hunting,' 'a-fishing' &c

*As*—when. Once—formerly and not on a single occasion

21 *There*—In the spot where Zephyr met Aurora

22. *Washed in dew*—Bathed in dew and looking all the more fresh and charming. Cf. Tennyson's 'Dream of Fair Women,' 141

" . . . Fresh washed in coolest dew &c "

and *The Taming of the Shrew*, II. I. 174

• "As morning roses newly washed with dew"





Fill'd her with thee, a daughter fair,  
 So buxom, blithe, and debonair ..  
 Haste thee, Nymph, and bring' with thee 25  
 Jest, and youthful Jollity,

23. *Filled*—impregnated The noun is 'wind,'

*Filled thee*—made her conceive thee i.e. made her thy mother

24. *Buxom*—Bright, lively, lit 'buck-some', 'bending', 'yielding', 'submissive', from A. S. *būgan*, to bend, the root of 'bow'. And as obedience, or a pliant disposition is one of the highest virtues of a woman, the word came to be used as a compliment to ladies in the sense of 'handsome', 'charming'. The modern sense of the word is 'stout, well rounded and at the same time good-natured and kindly'.

*Blithe*—merry *Debonair*—Lit. of good air or appearance from Fr. *air*, of, *bon*—good, & *air*, look, hence, of good temper and disposition

25—40 These lines, as has already been pointed out, are the liveliest and most poetic description of the accompaniments of Mirth or gaiety i.e. laughter and its various manifestations—the ways in which *mirth* shows itself outwardly

25. *Haste thee*—Hasten *thyself* to me, 'The pronoun in such expressions, is now said to be used *reflexively* or *reflectively*. In old English it was called the "ethic Dative". This use of the pronoun was very common in Elizabethan writers. Sir Walter Scott also makes a very large use of this form. Cf. 'Hie thee,' 'sit thee down,' 'fare thee well' &c

*Nymph*—Thou sweet fairy, Mirth. In Greek mythology, the Nymphs were goddesses presiding over mountains, streams, forests, trees, meadows, etc

26. *Jest*—Merry jokes. *Youthful Jollity*—gaiety or merriment that can amuse young people. All these are personified and represented as companions of Mirth

Quips, and cranks, and wanton wiles,  
 Nods, and becks, and wreathéd smiles .  
 ' Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,  
 And love to live in dimple sleek .

30

27 *Quips wiles*—Smart, clever and odd turns of speech  
*Quips*—Smart sayings 'short sayings of a sharp wit with a bitter  
 sense in a sweet word' *Cranks*—Odd turns of speech words  
 used in an inverted or distorted sense, puns deliberately crooked  
*Wanton wiles*—playful tricks practical jokes *Wile* is a sly insi-  
 dious artifice and is the same word as *quile* Cf 'wise and guise'  
 Both 'wanton and 'wile' are used in a 'bad sense in modern  
 English cf 'wanton cruelty', 'the wiles of the serpent'

28 *Nods and becks*—Quick movements of the body signs with  
 the head and fingers Sportive gestures and signs expressive of  
 mirth or gaiety *Nods* Signs made with the head *Becks*—  
 signs made with the finger hence the verb *to beckon* Cf Burton's  
*Anatomy of Melancholy*

"With becks and nods—he first began to try the wenche's mind,  
 With becks and nods and smiles again no answers did he find"

*Wreathéd smiles*—smiles that wreathed or puckered the  
 features,—caused them to be folded and dimpled,—contrasted with  
 wrinkled *Chin* below It is an instance of *Hypallage* or *Transferred*  
*Epithet*, in which there is a transference of attributes from their  
 proper subjects to others, 'wreathéd' being properly applicable  
 to the face or features

29 *Such cheek*—like those which ever mark the cheek of  
 Hebe—the cup bearer of the gods, and the presiding goddess of  
 Youth and Beauty *Hang on*—cling perpetually to, are always  
 found in

*Hebe*—in Greek mythology, the daughter of Zeus and Hera,  
 was the goddess of youth, and waited on the gods as cup-bearer.  
 Later traditions represent her as a divinity who had power to  
 restore youth to the aged—*Bell*

30 *And sleek*—are wont to dwell in, i e (are ever seen in,  
smooth, charming hollows in the cheek *Dimple*—A slight natural  
 depression on the surface of the body and especially in the cheek or  
 chin. *Sleek*—smooth, soft





Sport that wrinkled Care derides,  
 And Laughter holding both his sides  
 Come, and trip it as you go  
 On the light fantastic toe , 34

31 *That derides*—that laughs at or defies cares and anxieties which cause furrows on the brow

32 *Laughter sides*—Laughter is personified and represented as pressing both his sides closely with his hands lest they should split or burst. We speak of people 'bursting' or 'splitting' with laughter. 'Laughter' and all the other companions of Mirth—'Sport,' 'Nods,' 'Becks,' 'Smiles,' 'Quips,' 'Cranks,' 'Wiles,' 'Jest' and 'Jollity' are all objects of 'bring' in l. 25

33 *Trip it*—have a dance—the *it* is cognate accusative, representing the object implied in the governing verb, hence 'trip it' = 'trip' a tripping *it* 'to lord *it*', 'to prince *it*', 'to queen *it*', 'to fight *it* out' &c. This use of the pronoun was very common in Elizabethan writers, and arose perhaps from a desire to avoid the repetition of the noun in the 'Cognate Accusative.' Thus, "*trip it*—*trip a tripping*" but this being a somewhat cumbersome phrase the substantive is displaced by the pronoun. In other words, the *it* represents the substantive implied in the governing verb.—Hales

34 *On toe*—as you go along with free easy steps in a fanciful manner *i.e.*, as you dance merrily along Cf. *Comus*

"Beat the ground"

In a *light fantastic* round

*Fantastic toe*—Another instance of Transferred Epithet or Hypallage. The toe is called *fantastic* or 'full of fancy' alluding to the easy or 'fanciful' manner in which Mirth is supposed to dance or make others dance. *Fantastic* now means 'grotesque'

And in thy right hand lead with thee 35  
 The mountain nymph, sweet Liberty,  
 And if I give thee honour due  
 Mirth, admit me of thy crew,  
 To live with her, and live with thee  
 In unproved pleasures free, 40

33-36 And as you come along dancing, lead on to me with thy right hand the Goddess of Liberty or Freedom, who lives in mountains

By asking Mirth to bring with her Liberty or Freedom, the Poet means that there can be no real enjoyment of Mirth without freedom that *restraint* of any kind is fatal to real merriment, that Mirth or gaiety to be really enjoyed must be perfectly *free* or *unrestrained*

36 *The Mountain Nymph sweet Liberty*—There is no mythology about Liberty being a mountain nymph. Perhaps the poet is thinking of ancient Greece, Switzerland, Wales and other mountainous countries in which national freedom has been defended by the hardy inhabitants and where the people enjoy a certain amount of security against foreign invasions on account of the natural defences of the land. But some commentators think that no such special allusion is intended, but Milton simply refers to the freedom from conventional restraints and the general sense of unconfinement that belongs to mountains

37-40. *And if I give thee*—And if I pay you all the respect that you are entitled to, O mirth, do you take me into your merry group and let me enjoy your sweet company and that of Liberty and freely partake of all your innocent pleasures. *If I give thee*—a rhetorical subjunctive, 'giving you as I do, all the honour due to you as a goddess, since I pay you all the respect that is your due and give you a hearty welcome—*Admit me of*—Take me into, let me join. *Crew*—Company; group, used now in a bad sense except in ship's 'crew' *To live*,—so that I may live,—a rather loose construction. *With her*—i.e., Liberty. To live with mirth and Liberty is of course to make oneself merry, to enjoy oneself to one's heart's content with the utmost freedom from all restraint. *Unproved*—irreproachable, pure, innocent,—an instance of 'ed for' able', Cf. P. L. IV. 492

"Of conjugal attraction *unproved*."





To hear the lark begin his flight

And singing startle the dull night 42

41-45 *To hear* So—admit me of thy crew so that I may hear the lark begin its flight, and suddenly rouse drowsy people from their sleep by his songs from the high regions of the sky, whence he watches the dawning of *the day* and the rising of the Sun like a sentinel in the lofty watch-tower of a fort

41 *To hear*—So that I may hear

42 *Startle* Inf dependent upon *hear* ' Warton notes that there is a peculiar propriety in 'startle,' the lark's is a sudden shrill burst of song, which is often heard just before sunrise, and may therefore be said to scare away the darkness "—*Bell*

*Dull*—meat, drowsy, silent or senseless Cf Shakespeare, *Henry V* iv 1

' Piercing the Night's dull ear  
and Gray, *Elegy*

' Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,  
Or Flattery sooth the *dull* cold ear of Death ?'

From his watch-tower in the skies,  
Till the dappled dawn doth rise ,

44

43-44 *From skies*—From the highest region of the air whence he watches the sun-rise like a sentinel in the lofty tower of a fort. The lark soars so high up in the sky as to be invisible Cf. Shelley's *Sky-lark*

“ Higher still and higher  
From the earth thou Springest  
Like a cloud of fire  
The blue deep thou wingest ‘&c’  
and Wordsworth

‘To the last point of vision and beyond  
Mount, darling warbler!’”

43 *Watch tower*—Sentinels in a watch-tower give the alarm at the first approach of an enemy. The *Night* builds his watch-tower in the skies to be timely apprised of the approach of his enemy, *Day*. The lark's sudden shrill burst of song startles him, as the trumpet note of the enemy's vanguard. Larks soar very high up in the air, singing all the while. Shakespeare speaks of a lark as singing “at heaven's gate”

44 *Dappled dawn*—A very happy expression and true to nature. *Dappled*—Streaked or spotted with diverse colours. “The epitaph exactly describes the streaks of light that flake the sky when the morning begins to break in upon the night”—*Verity*. Cf. *Much Ado About Nothing*, V III 25

“The gentle day.....”

*Dapples* the drowsy east with spots of grey”

Then to come, in spite of sorrow, 45  
 And at my window bid good-morrow  
 Through the sweetbriar, or the vine,  
 Or the twisted eglantine

45 *Then to come*—explained in four ways (1) and then *let me come* and *bid the lark* good morning, (2) and then *hear the lark come* and *&c bid me* good morning, (3) and then *let me come to the window* and *bid good morning to the world at large*, (4) and *let me come and bid good morning to my own family*. Of these four, the (2) is the best and most appropriate, though untrue to nature.

He wishes to hear the lark begin its flight and then see it descend, perch for a moment on his window-sill and hear it give him good morning.

This is one of the minor descriptions sketched in the poem which critics have found fault with on the score of untruthfulness to Nature, as the lark being a bird of the wilderness, never seeks human company as here described. But the student should remember that *strict literal fidelity to Nature is one thing, and high poetic art quite another*—that the real test of a poetic picture is not whether it is an exact copy of some outward reality, but whether it harmonises with the ideal whole as conceived by the poet.

45 *In spite of sorrow*—"In spite of" is used here literally in the sense of 'out of spite for' i.e. by way of spiting or defying, sorrow. Ordinarily, if any body is said to do anything 'in spite of sorrow,' the idea is that he did it, 'although he was sorrowful.' But there can be no sorrow with the joyous lark or with L'Allegro himself. The phrase, therefore means, 'out of a feeling of spite towards sorrow' i.e., to spite or defy sorrow.

47-48 *Through eglantine*—The window is overgrown with sweet briar (wild rose) vine and eglantine through which the lark says good morning. *Twisted eglantine*—The eglantine which (as a creeping plant) winds or coils itself round the window. The sweet briar and the eglantine are one and the same, and unless the poet meant to differentiate a special species by the epithet 'twisted'—the climbing dog-rose as some suggest—he is untrue to nature. But such inaccuracies are common with Spenser and other great poets, incompatible trees and flowers often appearing together in their poetry.

While the cock with lively din  
 Scatters the rear of darkness thin, 50  
 And to the stack, or the barn-door,  
 Stoutly struts his dames before

49. *The cock with lively din etc.*—"The image in the mind of the poet seems to have been that of a victorious warrior, who, to the clang of martial music (*with lively din*), pursues a flying enemy, whose troops become less and less dense, like darkness at the approach of light"—*Knightly*. To this may be added the idea in the next two lines. The victorious hero routs his enemy and then, comes back to his house and walks majestically before his queens.

49-52. *While before*—while the cock crows, and the last traces of lingering darkness fade away before the bright sunshine and the cock boldly and proudly walks before the hens to the barn or hay-stack.

*Lively din* loud, vigorous crowing. *Scatters thin*—chases away the last grey shades of night, dispels or disperses the lingering shades of night retreating (*i.e.* fading away) before the bright sunshine. The *thin rear of darkness* suggests the idea of the last traces of darkness fast retreating before the rising sun whose approach is announced by the cock's lively din, like the straggling rear of an army flying before the victorious enemy in pursuit. *Thin*—straggling, faded, faint. "The adjective 'thin' may be taken as qualifying 'rear' so we speak of the thin or straggling rear of an army as distinct from the close and serred van"—Bell. *Rear*—Lit. the hind part of an army, opp. to 'van', here = 'the traces or remnants'. *Stoutly*—walks upright in a proud, pompous manner. The cock walks forward before his hens with all the pomp of a victor who had by his 'shrill claxon', scared away the darkness of night.





Oft listening how the hounds and horn  
 Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn  
 From the side of some hoar hill, 55  
 Through the high wood echoing shrill;

53-6 *Oft listening*—connected with 'admit me of thy crew' in l 38. The construction being "Admit me into thy company so that I may listen &c" These lines describe another phase of the 'unreproved pleasures free' he is so eager to enjoy giving us a vivid word-picture of another aspect of the genial pleasures of a bright summer morning

*The hounds and horn morn*—The barking of the hounds and the twanging of the huntsman's 'echoing horn' joyfully awaken the morning Gray had this passage in mind when he wrote (*Elegy*, ll 19-20)

"The cock's shrill clarion or the echoing horn  
 No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed"

*'cheerly'*—joyfully, gladly Some read 'cheerly,' but *cheerly* occurs in Shakespeare very often Even Tennyson uses it Cf. *Lady of Shalott* "Hear a song that echoes *cheerly*"

*Hoar*—hoary with frost *High*—because situated on a hill.  
*Echoing shrill*—resounding with a sharp twanging sound

Sometime walking, not unseen, *at some other time walking, &c.*  
 By hedge-row elms, on hillocks green, *by the side of elm-trees standing in a row along hedges. Hillocks green—mounds of earth covered with green grass.*  
 Right against the eastern gate, *Directly, exactly. Against—facing.*  
 Where the great sun begins his state *60*  
 Robed in flames and amber light,  
 The clouds in thousand liveries dight,

57 *Sometime dight*—or, at some other time walking, &c. The construction being the same as in the case of 'listening', in l. 53.

*Not unseen*—in the open view of men. L'Allegro being naturally no lover of solitude requires witnesses of his pleasure. Il Penseroso, however, would like to remain in the back ground. Cf. Il Pens. l. 65, "And missing thee, I walk unseen."

58-61 *By*—by the side of. *Hedge-row elms*—elm-trees standing in a row along hedges. *Hillocks green*—mounds of earth covered with green grass. *Right*—Directly, exactly. *Against*—facing. *Eastern gate*—The eastern sky from which the Sun rises. *Begins his state*—commences his stately march or progress towards the west. *Robed in flames*—clad in brilliant lustre. *Amber*—yellow, like amber.

62 *The clouds dight*—The clouds being arranged in diverse colours.

*Liveries*—Lit. 'anything delivered, such as food, money or dress; the word has come to be used in the restricted sense of the dress served out to menials—the distinctive dress of a rich man's servants. The word suggests the idea of the clouds forming the retinue of the rising sun in their liveries of various colours.

*Dight*—Dressed, arrayed,—an obsolete word.





While the ploughman, near at hand,  
 Whistles o'er the furrow'd land,  
 And the milk-maid singeth blithe,  
 And the mower whets his scythe, 65  
 And every shepherd tells his tale  
 Under the hawthorn in the dale  
 Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures  
 Whilst the landscape round it measures, 70

63-68 *Near at hand*—close to where L. Allegro was standing to see the sun rise

*Enurrowed*—turned up by the plough *Blithe*—merrily, *Mower*—reaper. *Whets*—sharpens *Tells his tale*—Counts his sheep, just to find out if any has gone astray *Tale*—anything told or counted, A *S Tale* a number The phrase may, also, mean, simply 'amuses his lady-love by telling love stories' But as the poet is describing the morning occupations of the peasants, the former explanation is more appropriate,—morning, moreover, being seldom devoted to story-telling or love-making

*Dale*—valley, a word exclusively used in poetry to mean 'secluded rural spots.'

69-70 The scene shifts from morning to noon with that 'abrupt and rapturous start of the poet's imagination' which forms one of the greatest beauties in all poetry

*Straight*—Straightway, instantly, immediately.

*Mine eye*—'mine and thine' are used before words beginning with a vowel Cf *Hamlet*

"Give every man *thine* ear but few *thy* voice"

*Caught*—Come across, fallen upon

*Whilst measures*—While it (*my eye*) takes a view of the landscape round it, while I survey the surrounding scene.

*Landscape*, the general appearance of the country.

*Round*, an adverb modifying "measures," = around.

Russet lawns, and fallows gray,  
 Where the nibbling flocks do stray;  
 Mountains, on whose barren breast  
 The labouring clouds do often rest,

74

71-72 *Russet*—Reddish brown,—the colour of the rough clothes of peasants. *Verity* says that the word here means 'grey,' and quotes *Hamlet* 'the morn in russet mantle clad,' where *russet* means 'grey'—which is a perpetual epithet 'with Shakespeare and other Elizabethans for the dawn. "I believe 'russet lawns' and 'fallows grey' mean much the same thing, and that Milton is thinking of the ash-coloured appearance presented by a hill-side where the grass is short and poor of quality'—*Verity*

*Lawn*—Stretch of land, meadow

*Fallows*—Fields,—*Lat.* 'Pale-coloured 'tawny,' 'yellow,' an epithet applied to land ploughed up, but not yet bearing a crop, then to all land long left unfilled, and hence, grass-grown

*Grky*—Ash-coloured, owing to the poor quality of the hilly grass, or, covered with hoar-frost

*Nibbling*—Picking up the scanty grass. *Stray*—Roam at large

73-74 *Barren*—Bare, unproductive. *Labouring*—big with, and about to pour down, rain. 'labour' refers to child-birth. The clouds are compared to women in labour, as bringing forth rain and storm. *Barren breast*—Many commentators explain that the clouds rest on the tops of 'the mountains. But *breast* may refer to the part of the mountains, below the summit. This will bring out the meaning of 'labouring clouds' more forcibly. When the clouds are 'labouring' or 'about to bring forth rain, they usually descend very near to the earth, and rest far down the summits of high mountains. *Rest* may be taken to mean 'lean for support implying that before this, they were moving from place to place in the throes of delivery.

*Mountains, &c*—appositional to *new pleasures* in line 69.





Meadows trim with daisies pie'd. 75  
 Shallow brooks, and rivers wide,  
 Towers and battlements it sees  
 Bosom'd high in tufted trees,  
 Where perhaps some Beauty lies,  
 The Cynosure of neighbouring eyes. 80

75 *Trim*-Neat, snug *Pie'd*-Variegated, of diverse colours.

76-80. *Towers and battlements it sees &c*—My eyes also light on some splendid mansion, with lofty towers and battlements rising high up from amidst the dense foliage of surrounding trees,—the residence perhaps of some fine lady, the observed of all observers' in that part of the country. This is supposed to be a reference to the Windsor Castle on which the poet's eye might rest while taking a bird's eye view of the landscape round Horton where he lived when he wrote this poem. Others think that Harefield Place, the residence of the Countess of Derby—'The Cynosure of neighbouring eyes'—is alluded to.

*Battlements*—Parapets in the form of teeth on walls or roofs.

*Bosom'd*—embosomed, situated in the very heart or midst of.

*Tufted*—covered with dense foliage

*Lies*—dwells, spends her days with the languor of fashionable ladies. The word means 'to live, 'reside' in Shakespeare. Cf *Merry Wives*, II. 2 "The court lay at Windsor." *Cynosure*—Lat 'a dog's tail' from the Gr word *Kynos* dog *oura*, a tail—a term applied to the group of stars forming the tail of the constellation known as the Lesser Bear, by means of which Phœnician sailors guided the course of their ships. Hence the word means an object of great interest or attraction—drawing all eyes to it, even as the tail of the Lesser Bear draw the eyes of all manners to it. The lode-star

*Cynosure eyes*—an object of great interest and admiration with all the people of the locality,—'The observed of all observers'.

Hard by, a cottage chimney smokes  
 From betwixt two agèd oaks,  
 Where Corydon and Thyrsis, met,  
 Are at their savoury dinner set  
 Of herbs, and other country messes 85  
 Which the neat-handed Phillis dresses,  
 And then in haste her bower she leaves  
 With Thestylis to bind the sheaves,  
 Or, if the earlier season lead,  
 To the tann'd haycock in the mead 90

81-90 These lines describe rural home life at noon. *Hard by*—Close by, near at hand. *A cottage smokes*—is seen the smoke issuing out of the chimney of a peasant's cottage where the hearth has been lit to cook the meal.

\* *Corydon*, *Thyrsis*, *Thestylis* are all names of male rustics or shepherds, just as *Phyllis* is the common name for the nymph or shepherdess, in Pastoral Poetry—i.e. Poetry describing homely country life and scenes.

*Met*—having met. *Are set*—have sat down to their palatable dinner consisting of vegetables and other country dishes. *Savoury*—with a tempting flavour, inviting, palatable.

*Messes*—Lit that which is sent to the table, (Lat. *mito*, to send), dishes. *Neat-handed*—adept at cooking, dexterous so as to turn out neat or nice dishes—a Transferred Epithet. *Bower*—here, means the shepherd's cottage. *Bind*—make up into bundles.

*Or, if the earlier season lead*. Or, if the hay-harvest, which is earlier than the grain-harvest, requires her services, she hastens to the hay-field to stack the hay. *The earlier season*—the hay-harvest which precedes the grain-harvest. *Lead*—lead her thither, call her there. *To, &c. to go to*,—a Zeugma. *Tann'd*—brown, owing to exposure to the sun. *Hay-cock*—stack or pile of hay. *Mead*—mendow.





*the music of bells, bright voices*  
 Sometimes with secure delight  
 The upland hamlets will invite, (114)  
 When the merry bells ring round,  
 And the jocund rebecks sound

94

91-100 A description of rural holiday pleasures. Sometimes the happy cottages of the shepherds will draw the cheerful man to the holiday music and dancing indulged in by the young inmates — the many young peasants and shepherdesses — in the hawthorn shade variegated with bright and dark spots owing to the Sun's rays streaming through the quivering leaves of the trees.

*Secure*—free from care, *Lat sine*, without, and *cura*, care

*Upland*—country rural *Lat*, high-land as opposed to *plains* which generally contain towns. 'Upland hamlet' is contrasted with 'towered cities.'

*Hamlets*—*Lat home-let* = 'little home,' 'let' being a diminutive suffix, as in *rivulet*, *streamlet* &c., little villages.

*Jocund rebecks*—Merry guitars or fiddles—the prominent stringed instrument of rural orchestra.

To many a youth and many a maid,  
 Dancing in the chequer'd shade;  
 And young and old come forth to play  
 On a sun-shine holyday,

95

95 *To*—in accompaniment with, keeping time with.

*Many a*—(1) the 'a' is corruption of 'of' according to some, 'many of men' being the original expression. (2) Trench holds that 'Many a' is corrupted from old Fr[ *Mesnie*, a company or retinue, and 'a' the cor of 'of,' 'many a' = 'a company or group of,' the singular noun coming to be used for the plural through confusion of the 'a,' (really a preposition = 'of') with the article 'a' (3) A third view and the one that is commonly accepted, has it that 'Many' is cor of A S *Manig*, and 'a' is cor of 'one', 'Many a' being cor of '*manig enne*', 'a' being used as in 'Such a thing' 'What a thing' &c

*Chequered shade*—The shadow of trees marked with bright and dark spots owing to the sun light streaming through the quivering leaves *Chequered* or *Checked* (from Lat. *Scacorum*, a cor. of Persian *Shah*, king, the king being the chief piece in the game of chess—Fr' *echecs*, Ital *scacco*, Germ *schach*, Persian '*shah*'). lit. formed into little squares like a chess-board or checker by lines or stripes of different colours', hence marked or variegated with bright and dark spots.—the shadow being broken with bright spots owing to the rays falling on the ground through the quivering leaves For this very idea, Cf. Cowper, Task I

"The chequered earth seems restless as a flood  
 Brushed by the wind, so sportive is the light  
 Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance  
 Shadow and sun shine intermingling quick—"

*Sunshine* —Bright, an Adj.

Till the live-long daylight fail .

Then to the spicy nut-brown ale, 100

With stories told of many a feat,

How faery Mab the junkets eat ;

99. *Livelong* lit. that which lives or lasts long,—weary, with the time hanging heavily on one's hands, as in the long summer days.

100-10 With the setting in of evening the outdoor sports cease, and the parties come back home and sit down to their cups over which stories of ghosts and goblins are told.

*Fail*—fade, vanish *Till fail*—Till evening, the outdoor sports cease with evening

*Then to*—Then we come to or they proceed to Cf. l 44  
L'Allegro

*Spicy nut-brown ale*—A drink composed of hot-ale, nut-meg, sugar, toast, and roasted crabs or apples and variously spoken of as '*spiced wassail bowl*' '*Lamb's wool*' and '*Gossip's bowl*.' *Feat*—Lit, 'what is done', Lat *Facio*, to make, exploit, brave deed

*Mab*—The Queen of the Fairies who sent dreams Hence the phrase 'to be favoured with the visit of Queen Mab' means to dream strange dreams 'Mab in Welsh = child, and the fairy queen is called 'Mab' as she was represented, as, being diminutive in form like Titania

*Junkets*—dainties, delicacies, lit Cream-cheese served up on rushes, (It *Gruncu*, a rush), then, delicacies made of cream, then delicacy of any kind *Eat*—Past Tense=ate. The junkets were eaten by Mab to punish the people of the house for uncleanness.

She was pinch'd, and pull'd, she said  
And he, by Friar's lantern led.

104

103. *She was said*—One of the swains recites her experiences in the course of a dream when she was pinched by the Faines, and then a young shepherd follows with an account of his adventures with Jack-O'-Lantern who led him astray, and Robin Goodfellow who had also played his tricks on him.

\* *She*—a girl of the party. *Was pinched and pulled*—by faines in her dream. Faines were believed to punish lazy servants by pinching and pulling them by the ear in their dreams.

*Friar's Lantern*—The Ignis fatuus, also called 'Jack-O'-Lantern', 'Willow the Wisp', a flickering light seen in marshes at night, often leading astray ignorant way-farers who mistake it for lamp-light. Milton here confuses the out-door spirit Jack-O'-Lantern with the in-door spirit Friar's *Rush* which played all sorts of pranks in houses. "It was probably the name *Rush* which suggested rush light which caused Milton's error" *Keightley*. The spirit was called *Friar's Rush*, because it entered monasteries in the guise of a mendicant and played the monks all sorts of pranks.

104-105 *And he sweat*—The construction is either (1) 'he, led by the lantern tells', or (2) "She said she was pinched and pulled, and he said he was led by the lantern and tells how &c." Milton himself must have felt this construction to be very awkward and changed the line to "And by Friar's lantern led" (in the 1673 edition) which makes the passage very simple but changes the meaning, making 'she' the nominative to 'tells,' so that there is only one speaker or narrator throughout. But all editors agree in adhering to the reading of the 1645 edition which we have followed in the text.





Tells how the drudging Goblin sweat 105  
 To earn his cream-bowl duly set,  
 When in one night, ere glimpse of morn.  
 His shadowy flail bath thresh'd the corn

104-114 *And he sings*—A shepherdess having regaled the company with her 'jolly' experiences, some young swain diverts the party with an account of his adventures—how he was led astray by Jack-O'-Lantern on one occasion,—how on another, before day-dawn, the clownish harmless and hardworking spirit, Robin Good-fellow who did his drudgery with his usual zeal and perspired profusely just to have his bowl of cream placed before him by the grateful householder as his due reward,—having threshed out a quantity of corn, with his unemphatic flail, that ten men could not have done in a whole day,—lay down stretching himself to the full length of the fire-place just to warm his strong hairy body, and having eaten his fill cleared out before cock-crow.

*Drudging-goblin*—Hobgoblin, or Robin Good-fellow, the servant-spirit who was condemned to all sorts of drudgery (i.e. menial work, e.g. threshing corn, hewing wood, cleaning houses, drawing water, sweeping hearths, &c. for a *mess of milk* (cream-bowl) &c.—A harmless in-door spirit Shakespeare calls it 'Puck' The jester of Oberon, the Fairy King Of Mid Night Dream, II 1. 3, where it is thus addressed by Fairy —

"—are you that shrewd and knavish sprite  
 Called Robin good-fellow Are you not he  
 That frights the maidens of the villagery,  
 Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern —  
 Those that Hobgoblin call you and sweet Puck  
 You do their work and they shall have good luck  
 Are you not he?"

105 *Sweat*—For sweated, past tense—perspired profusely after working hard *Earn*=have as his reward, *cream bowl*=bowl or cup of cream—of which this Spirit was very fond and for which he would do any drudgery, however hard

*Duly set*—placed before him as his due by the inmates of the house whom he had served

*Glimpse of morn*—Day-dawn

*Shadowy*—Unearthly, invisible, as belonging to a spirit

*Flail*—Instrument for threshing corn

That ten day-labourers could not end ;  
 Then lies him down the lubber fiend, 110  
 And, stretch'd out all the chimney's length,  
 Basks at the fire his hairy strength ,

*That end*—Which even ten workmen could not finish working the whole day

110. *Lies him down*—Lays himself down—lies down.

*Lubber fiend*—clownish thick-skulled spirit, so Shakespeare calls Peck 'the lob of spirits'. *Lubbe*, or *lubbard* means a 'clumsy awkward fellow' (from *welsh*, *llot*, a dolt) Cf. Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, III

"There is a pretty tale of a witch that had a giant to be (as) her son that was called '*Lob-lie-by the fire, i.e.* Loh who always lies by the fireside or hearth to warm himself." Milton had this passage in mind when he wrote of the '*lubber fiend*' as '*stretching out all the chimney's length and basking his hairy strength at the fire.*'

111 *Stretched length*—Stretched at full length and occupying the whole length of the fire place, as he lay stretched at full length his giant form occupied the whole length of the fire-place

*Chimney*—Fire-place "Length" is Adverbial object of space—for the whole length

*Basks*—exposes for warmth = warms

\* *Hairy strength*—Abstract for concrete,—tall, gaunt form covered with hair, his shaggy tall figure.





And crop-full out of doors he flings,  
Ere the first cock his matin rings,

Thus done the tales, to bed they creep, 115.  
By whispering winds soon lull'd asleep

Tower'd cities please us then . . .  
And the busy hum of men,

*Crop-full*—With his stomach well filled, having eaten his fill  
*Crop* is the first stomach of the fowl

*Out of doors flings*—Flings himself, i. e., rushes forth out of the house

*Ere rings*, before the first cockerow announces the dawn of day  
Spirits were bound to return to the nether world before cockerow.

*Matin*—Morning song (French *matin*, morning), cf. *Hamlet*  
'The glowworm shows the *matin* to be near,' the word now means 'morning prayers'  
*Rings*—Sings.

*Thus tales*—The story-telling being over

*By us leep*—Are soon lulled to sleep by the cool rustling winds  
The gentle sound of the wind lulls them to sleep  
Lull is an onomatopœic word = 'to sing to sleep,' from the sound *lu lu* which women repeat while sending babies to sleep

116—125. These lines mark a transition from the simple homely scenes of rural mirth to busy, dazzling, gorgeous amusements of city life.

*Towered*, containing lofty, splendid buildings

*Then*—on another occasion; at one time the 'upland hamlets of the country invite L'Allegro; at another, the 'towered cities' attract him

*Busy hum*—The bustle, tumult.

Where throngs of knights and barons bold,  
 In weeds of peace high triumphs hold, 120  
 With store of ladies, whose bright eyes  
 Rain influence, and judge the prize  
 Of wit or arms, while both contend  
 To win her grace, whom all commend  
 There let Hymen oft appear 125  
 In saffron robe, with taper clear,

*Throngs*—bold, crowds of people of the highest rank, knights and noblemen

*In weeds*—hold, give splendid entertainments in gay or festive attire *W*eeds of *peace*, dress suitable for festive occasions in times of peace, as opp-*to* coats of mail or armour, the dress for war *H*igh *tr*iumphs—grand entertainments, splendid pageants *W*ith *l*adies—before crowds of ladies *W*hose *comm*end—whose sparkling eyes pour forth inspiration into the hearts of the players and who award the prizes to the winners in the various exhibitions of wit (such as poetry, music, dramatic performance) or of arms (*e.g.* tilting, archery &c.) while men in both these kinds of feats vied with one another to gain the favour of her whom all praise and to whose decision all bow as she is the Queen of Love and Beauty This is a very poetic description of the courts or parliaments of Love such as were held in France till the end of the 14th century and the tournaments of the middle ages.

*Rain*—Pourforth, shower, *Influence* lit., the power or virtue *flowing from stars and planets upon men* (Lat. *in* ipso, and *flu*o to flow); inspiration, encouragement *Rain influence*=inspire the hearts of the performers *Judge*—adjudge, award *The prize of* *wit or arms*—The prize to the winners in feats of intelligence (skill in poetry, dramatic performance, music &c.) and warlike sports.

*Both*—i.e., men engaged in both these kinds of exhibition. *Her grace whom all commend*—the good graces of her whom all commend—a Latinism.

125-130. A description of marriage festivities in fashionable life.

*Hymen*—the god of marriage in Gr. mythology, crowned with flowers and carrying a lighted taper in his hand.

*Saffron*—Bright yellow—the colour of saffron/ *Clear*—Bright.





And pomp, and feast, and revelry,  
 With mask, and antique pageantry ;  
 Such sights as youthful poets dream  
 On summer eves by haunted stream 130

*Pomp*—Festive procession, splendid train

*Revelry*—Revels or dramatic entertainments so common at the court and houses of great nobles in the 15th and 16th centuries. *Mask*—a sort of dramatic performance very common in the Elizabethan period in which the men of the highest circles appeared in masks. Milton's *Comus* is a *mask*. *Antique*—old-fashioned, ancient. *Pageantry*—shows or representations in which mythological persons were introduced. The miracle-plays are probably referred to. *Pageantry* is lit. the pl. of *pageant*, originally meaning a platform or stage on which miracle plays were acted, then the word came to denote the plays themselves,—then, any grand show or spectacle.

129-130) *Such sights*—in apposition with 'mask' and 'pageantry'. *As stream*, as the imagination of youthful poets conjure up before their mind's eye while indulging in poetic visions on the bank of some river haunted by fairies and nymphs.

Then to the well-trod stage anon,  
 If Jonson's learned sock be on,

131-134 *Then ..will*—Let me then proceed to the theatre soon after, where the player act their parts so well, to see if one of Ben Jonson's or Shakespeare's comedies is being acted. Milton here says that Shakespeare pleased through a certain wild and native elegance.

*Anon*—*Int in one moment*, soon after

*If Jonson . on*—If the players are performing one of the great, classical scholar Ben Jonson's comedies. *Sock* was a kind of slippers worn by actors in the comedies of ancient Rome, hence emblematic of Comedy in general as the 'buskin' is of Tragedy. The epithet 'learned' refers to the great classical learning for which Ben Jonson was famous. Shakespeare was not much of a classical scholar and Ben Jonson ridiculed the stock of his classical knowledge as being "little Greek and less Latin"

Ben Jonson 1574-1637 A celebrated English dramatist. He was alive when Milton wrote his *L'Allegro*. The contemporary and almost the rival of Shakespeare. Of the writings of the two it has been remarked that, reading Ben Jonson, you wonder that ever man should have had such thoughts, and reading Shakespeare, you wonder that such thoughts never occurred to you before.

*Be on*—be put on by the actors





Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,  
Warble his native wood-notes wild.

And ever against eating cares, 135

Lap me in soft Lydian airs,

(1) *sweetest wild*—Or if sweetest Shakespeare sing the wild notes of his native land, i.e., if one of the charming romantic comedies produced by the strikingly natural genius of that great master of melody, Shakespeare—a poet who was of ‘imagination all compact’—were put on the stage

*Sweetest*—refers to the exquisite charm of Shakespeare's poetry.

*Fancy's child*—The offspring of Phantasy, born and bred by the Nymph Phantasy or Imagination as it were, hence a poet with extraordinary imaginative powers

*Warble wild*—sing his sweet songs the natural and spontaneous effusions of his heart. Shakespeare is compared to a bird pouring forth the wild melody of the woods. Cf. the expression ‘*The sweet swan of Avon*’—commonly bestowed on Shakespeare (Observe how the sound echoes the sense in this couplet and also the play of Alliteration. L'Allegro of course refers to the romantic comedies of Shakespeare like *Merry Wives of Windsor*, or the *Tempest*, and therefore speaks of him as ‘Fancy's child,’ while he pays a tribute to his striking natural genius by referring to his ‘wild native wood-notes.’

135-150 These lines describe the pure, ennobling pleasures of music

*Ever against*—As a protection against; By way of shutting out altogether. *Eating cares*—anxieties which eat into or corrode our very vitals. *Lap me*—Wrap me up, let me be folded, or surrounded by (as a protection against eating cares). *Lydian airs*—Music of a light soft, effeminate type. The ancient Greeks divided Music into, (1) Dorian (Stirring or Martial), (2) Phrygian (tender or amorous), and (3) Lydian (light or jovial). L'Allegro naturally prefers the last as best suited to his light jovial temperament.

Married to immortal verse,  
 Such as the meeting soul may pierce, *penetrate*.  
 In notes, with many a winding bout  
 Of linked sweetness long drawn out, 140  
 With wanton heed and giddy cunning,  
 The melting voice through mazes running,

137. *Married to*—Wedded to, associated with *Immortal verse*—Undying poetry

*Married verse*—music accompanied by, united with poetry

*Such.. pierce*—such as may penetrate the soul that sympathises with it

*Meeting*—sympathising, appreciating, fully entering into the depth of the music

*Meeting soul*—The soul goes out to meet the music, which calls it from its retirement

*Pierce*—Penetrate, stir deeply, thrill.

*In notes*—In the shape of notes,

*Winding bout*—circuitous turn or strain (in an intricate or difficult piece of music)

*Of ..out*—consisting of different parts joined together so as to form one sweet harmonious whole spun out or protracted for a long time; a long chain of sweet sounds.

*With wanton cunning*—played with perfect freedom yet remarkable accuracy and skill. The music is *apparently* careless, *really* skilful; its art is concealed under a pretence of artlessness.

*Wanton heed*—Free unrestrained carefulness—an example of the fig. *Ozymoron*

*Giddy cunning*—Skill displayed by one who has been carried away entirely by his zeal or phrenzy and therefore feels giddy as it were—also an *Ozymoron*. *Cunning*—Kenning knowledge.

*Melting*—Softening or touching the heart of the audience; or, growing softer and softer.

*Through...running*—going through intricate involutions or passages; 'voice' is now absolute. *Masses*—intricate passages in a labyrinth.

142-144. *The melting...harmony*—The voice runs through intricate strains, and lets loose every chain that restrains the hidden soul of music.





Untwisting all the chains that tie  
 The hidden soul of harmony;  
 That Orpheus' self may heave his head 145  
 From golden slumber on a bed

143-144. *Untwisting . harmony*—Unravelling all the mysterious charms that envelop the spirit of music or harmony

Music or harmony is described as lying enchained and hidden in the soul, and is only set free when some sweet stimulus in the shape of first-class music touches a chord within us, 'Milton's meaning is that as the voice of the singer runs through the manifold mazes or intricacies of sound, all the chains are untwisted which imprison and entangle the hidden soul.

Cf. *Merchant of Venice*, V I.

"Such harmony is in immortal souls,  
 But whilst the muddy vesture of decay,  
 Doth grossly close it in, we cannot bear it"

Cf. also Dryden's song for *St Cecilia's Day*.

"From harmony, from Heavenly harmony  
 This universal frame began,  
 Where nature underneath a heap  
 Of jarring atoms lay  
 And could not heave her head,  
 The tuneful voice was heard from high—  
 Arise, Ye more than dead!"

145-152. That *Orpheus' self*—so that the heaven-born musician Orpheus himself &c.

*Orpheus*—A famous musician of Thrace whose music is said to have charmed even beasts, trees and rocks. He succeeded in touching the heart of Pluto, the King of Hades who, charmed with his exquisite music, restored his wife Eurydice to him. Orpheus's prayer to have his wife restored to him was granted on the condition that he would not look back towards her when going away. Orpheus, however, forgot it, and happening to see if Eurydice was following him, she was taken back to Hades.

*Heave*—raise, lift *Golden*—supremely blessed or happy." Cf. *Golden age*.

Of heap'd Elysian flowers, and hear  
 Such strains as would have won the ear  
 Of Pluto, to have quite set free  
 His half-regained Eurydicé.

150

These delights if thou canst give,  
 Mirth, with thee I mean to live.

7 Milton

147-148 *Elysian*—heavenly, divine, Elysium was the abode of the souls of the virtuous. *Won*—charmed and thus inspired his sympathy

149 *Pluto*—The God of the Nether world—the realm where the dead go to before they are admitted into Elysium or sent to Tartarus. *Quite set free*—Wholly set at liberty. In this passage Milton has been thought to refer to the superiority of modern music to ancient

150 *Half-regained*—whom he only half got back—he got only to lose soon after. Orpheus, by his music, recovered his wife on the condition that he should not look back upon her till she was in the upper air. He *did* look back, and she returned to the shades. Hence she was only half-regained. Milton says, "had he sung mirthful music, Pluto would have *quite* resigned her."

*These delights live*—If such pleasures, O, Mirth, you can bring me, I shall live with thee—I shall be only too glad to take to a life of mirth if it can bring me such pure chaste, genuine delights as described above.





## Prose rendering of L' ALLEGRO.

### Lines 1-10..

O thou loathed Melancholy ' born of Cerberus and blackest—Midnight in that forlorn Stygian cave, amidst horrid shapes and unholy shrieks and sights, go hence, and find out some uncouth cell where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings and where the midnight raven sings, and dwell for ever in dark Cimmerian desert under shades that are ebony or dark and under low-browed rocks, the ruggedness of which equals that of thy locks.

### Lines 11-24.

O thou, fair and free goddess ' Called Euphroayne in Heaven, and heart-easing Mirth by men on earth, whom lovely Venus bore to ivy-crowned Bacchus at one birth along with two more sister Graces, Aglia and Thalia or, as some sing more wisely of thy parentage, *viz*—that the frolicsome wind which animates the spring-zephyr, playing with Aurora, and having an amorous meeting with her when she was going a-Maying, on beds of blue violets and fresh-blown roses washed in dew, made her pregnant with thee, so fair, buxom, blithe and *debonair* a daughter, do thou come.

**Lines 25-68.**

O Mirth! do thou hasten, and bring along with thee all thy companions. *viz.*, jest, youthful jollity, quips, cranks, wanton Wiles, Nods, Becks, and wreathed smiles,—those that hang on Hebe's cheek and love to live in sleek dimple, do thou bring also Sport that derides wrinkled Care, and also Laughter holding both his sides. O Mirth! do thou come, and trip on as those and all thy above-named companions go on the light fantastic toe, and lead sweet Liberty—the mountain nymph with thee on thy right hand; but the pleasures I have to propose are patronised by thee. O Mirth! do thou admit me, as a member of thy assembly, to live with liberty as well as with thee in innocent and unrestrained pleasures;—Such as, to hear the lark-singing and soaring to heaven's gate—his watch-tower, and thence startling dull Night by the sudden burst of his early songs, till the morning or Dawn which beautifies the sky with streaks of various colours doth rise in the east; and then coming through the sweet briar, the vine, or the twisted eglantine, to my window to bid me 'goodmorning,' setting sorrow at defiance, as it were, with the cheerfulness of his songs: while the cock by his merry continued crowing chases away the last grey shades of night, and gallantly stalks in front of his wrens: do thou, O Mirth! also admit me often listening or let me derive pleasure from listening, how the hounds and horns of huntsmen cheerfully awake the sleeping Morning from the side of some hoary hill, echoing shrilly through some high wood. Let also derive pleasure from sometimes walking in the in view of men, as befits a cheerful man, by the of elm trees that grow along the lines of hedges on

green hillocks, with my face to the brightening east when the great Sun begins his stately, royal progress in the sky, dressed in a garment of fire and orange hues, the clouds being decked in many variegated colours; while the ploughman near at hand cheerfully whistles over the furrowed land, and the milkmaid merrily sings, and the mower sharpens his scythe, and every shepherd counts the number of the sheep in his flock under the hawthorn in the valley.

### Lines 69-80.

My eye, whilst it surveys the country all round, has, all on a sudden or unexpectedly, come upon new beauties and delights, such as, reddish-brown grass plots, hoary pasture-lands, where flocks of sheep wander over picking up scanty herbage, mountains on whose middle part the clouds teeming with rains collect together, smooth meadows adorned with daisies of variegated colors, shallow rivulets, wide rivers such as the Thames and Coln, the high mansion-house or castle with walls, or turrets on the roofs, enclosed on a height with feathery trees, where most likely some very famous beautiful lady resides as the Polar Star or the observed of all observers in the neighbourhood.

### Lines 81-90.

Not far off, smoke rises from a cottage chimney situated between two old oaks, where two villagers or male rustics having met together, sit down to their savoury, regular dinner of herbs and other coarse rustic dishes which Phyllis or some neatly and cleanly working village maiden cooks and makes ready for

them, and then the one rustic female leaves her shaded cottage with another of her sex and rank in order to bind the sheaves in the field, or Phyllis leaves her bower if the earlier season lead to the hay-stock in the meadow.

### **Lines 91-116.**

The upland hamlets will sometimes invite with secure delight when the merry bells ring all round the neighbouring village on festive occasions and the jocund fiddles are played in harmony or concordance with many a young male rustic and many a village maiden dancing on shady places marked with lights and shadows or formed into little squares by lines of different colours; the young and old come forth to play on a sunny holiday till long, long day light vanishes at the approach of night then, when it grows too dark for outdoor amusements, they have recourse to the spicy nut-brown ale, with stories told of many feat—such as how the Fairy Queen, Mab, eat the junkets or milk dainties, one village-maiden said how she was pinched and pulled by fairies, one rustic youth tells how at a time he was led astray by the Will-O'the-Wisp, and how at another time Robin Goodfellow sweated to earn his cream-bowl regularly placed for him without failure, how in one night the said spirit's ghostly flail has threshed, before the beams of the dawn could be visible, so great a quantity of corn that *ten* strong day-labourers could not finish threshing in that short space of time; then how the clumsy, clownish fiend lies down, stretched out to the full length of the whole chimney, and how the fiend warms and invigorates at the fire his strong body covered

with hair, and how at last, the fiend, having eaten stomach full of the cream-bowl, rushes out of doors before the first cock crows thereby announcing the approach of the morning

### **Lines 117-135.**

At night when upland scenes cease to please, the towered cities, with their hums of busy crowds, where many a knight-errant and bold baron in festal dresses hold tournaments or public exhibitions, with many a lady whose bright eyes—as though they are real stars, let flow influence on human destinies, and adjudge the rewards of literary or martial skill to the best competitor, while both compete to gain the favour of the most beautiful lady, the observer of all observers or the object of general praise—please the merry or cheerful men. In the towered city let the god of marriage often appear in yellowish robes, with the bridal torch in one hand, with the concomitants of marriage festivity, *viz*, grand processions, masquerades, the old-fashioned pageant or pompous shows of images or dramatic performances, and with similar other shows which young poets fancy on a summer evening, sitting on the bank of a river frequented by fairies or spirits. The cheerful or the merry man quickly goes to the theatre, to see if the good actors and actresses are playing any of Ben Jonson's learned comedies, or any of sweet-singing Shakespeare, possessed of the most exuberant fancy, he who sung the wild, romantic melody which he had learned in the woods of his own native country, in other words, if any of Shakespeare's comedies such as the "Midsummer Nights Dream" is being played on the stage

### **Lines 135-150**

As a set-off from or an antidote to the anxieties and troubles of this life, let me, says L'Allegro or the cheerful man, be always surrounded by the pleasant Lydian style of melody, joined or wedded to such songs or poetry as the world will not willingly let die—such music as may penetrate the soul that meets, or is touched by it, in songs with many an intricate turning or fold of connected melodious voice protracted to a great length with seemingly careless caution and skill! seemingly running at random, the voice dissolving the hearts of the hearers with pathos by getting softer and softer though passing rapidly through intricacies, untying the chains that imprison the essence or power of harmony, so that the Son himself of Apollo being roused for a time from his golden dreams in Elysium, may hear such melodious music as would have so charmed grim Death's ear as to have released Eurydice, though but partially restored

### **Lines 151-152.**

Now O Mirth ! if thou canst give all these delights that are described above, I, L'Allegro or the cheerful man means to live with thee

# **Il Penseroso.**

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**TEXT  
&  
NOTES.**

## THE ARGUMENT.

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**1-10.** Il Penseroso dismisses 'vain deluding joys' from his presence and bids them go back into the idle brains of fools—in which they have their origin and which are their proper abode

**11-30.** Invocation to Melancholy—her nature and parentage

**21-55.** The accompaniments of Melancholy

**56-84.** The delights of evening congenial to Melancholy—the sights and sounds of the moon-lit night enjoyed by *Penseroso unseem*

**85-120.** Delights of the study of Philosophy, Tragedy and other serious Literature at midnight

**121-30.** Delights of solitude in a stormy morning

**131-50** Noon-day delights

**151-166.** The delights of congenial music—the pealing organ in the studious cloister

**167-74.** Longing for some peaceful hermitage in which to spend his weary age in the study of stars and plants

**174-6.** Conclusion—seeks those pleasures and accepts Melancholy as his companion

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# IL PENSEROSO.

Hence, vain deluding joys,  
The brood of folly without father bred,  
How little you bestead,  
Or fill the fix'd mind with all your toys!  
Dwell in some idle brain,  
And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess  
As thick and numberless  
As the gay motes that people the sunbeams;  
Or likest hovering dreams  
The fickle pensioners of Morpheus' train

## NOTES

ON

## IL PENSEROSO.

### (The praises of Melancholy).

*Il Penseroso*—An Italian word = 'The pensive or thoughtful man'. Some Commentators—Pattison, Garnett &c.—have taken exception to the title of this poem on the ground that "there is no such word as *Penseroso*," the adj. from '*Pensiero*,' being '*Pensieroso*,' and that even had the word been written correctly, its signification is not that which Milton intended, *viz.* 'thoughtful or contemplative,' but 'anxious,' 'full of cares,' 'carking.' Verity points out that these critics are wrong on both points through ignoring the difference between modern and earlier Italian, the word '*penseroso*' being a current term when Milton wrote this poem, and meaning what he intended it to mean, *viz.* 'musing,' 'meditating'.

This poem depicts the isolated studious life of the contemplative man 'with whom reflection is the first word and last'—and, in striking contrast with its sister poem, describes an ideal day spent by a thoughtful man of culture such as Milton himself was while living at Horton.

1-10 The man of meditation bids all sorts of vain joys to leave him and go to some idle, ease-loving pleasure-seeker whose head is always full of foolish fancies or dreams of pleasure

1 Hence &c.—An echo of the opening lines of the well-known song in Fletcher's play of 'the Nice Valour'

'Hence all you vain delights,

As short as are the nights

Wherein you spend your folly !'

and also of the following lines of Sylvester's *Tragedy of Henry the Great*

'Hence, hence false pleasures, momentary joys,

Mock us no more with your illuding toys !'

The poem opens in the same strain as *L'Allegro*

Vain deluding joys Joys that first attract the minds of the victims and then lead them on to misery, as sensual pleasures do

*Vain*=unsubstantial, utterly worthless *deluding*=false, *decep-*

*ive* Observe that *Il Penseroso* banishes only the *false pleasures*, and *not* the *true pleasures* sought for by *L'Allegro*

2 *The brood* etc.—*Brood*=progeny, offspring The false pleasures are described as the illegitimate offspring of Folly to imply that they are the product of sheer foolishness or weakness of mind.

For the idea, Milton is indebted to Greek mythology, in which the goddess Night 'bare children'—Death, Dreams, Sleep &c without a husband Notice the cognate use of *brood* and *breed*

*Without father bred*—born without a father, illegitimate, implying that they are wicked and disreputable. All this is, of course Milton's own inventing as in the case of *Myth*, (See *L'Allegro* lines 1-10.)

3. *How little you bestead*—How little is your influence on *I'll bestead*=to help, to give aid, to be in *stead* of, an obsolete word surviving only in certain phrases and compounds, as, in good *stead*, *steadfast*, *homestead*, *steady*, *bedstead*, *instead* of &c

4. *Or fill the fixed mind* etc.—and how little you fill, etc. Your charms are of no use to the firm, strong mind of the contemplative man *Toys*—trifles, worthless pleasures. The *false pleasures* are but mere trifles to the strong-minded man.

*Fixed*—steady, firm, as opposed to the everchanging mind of the man of pleasure.





5 *Idle brain*—foolish mind, the head of some foolish lazy person

6 *And Fancies fond, etc.*—And seize his foolish imagination with gorgeous attractive ideas or schemes of pleasure. *Fancies fond*—foolish imaginations. *Fond* is here used in its primary sense of 'foolish', *possess* implies that the joys are like so many evil spirits. This sense is supported by *shapes* which, as in *L'Allegro*, line 4, means *shadows* or *spirits*. *Gaudy shapes*, gorgeous forms or ideas of pleasure attracting the mind with their outward glamour.

7-10 *As thick train*—As densely crowded together and innumerable as the myriads of bright dust—particles that permeate the sunbeams or most closely resembling the ever-changing dreams that hover over persons in sleep.

7 *Thick*—Qualifies 'shape' and means 'abundant' as in the phrase, 'as thick as hail,' it is distinguished from 'numberless' in the idea that the 'shapes' are to appear in quick succession, one batch following close upon another.

8 *Gay*—Bright. *Motes* particles of dust. *Gay*, because the motes appear to dance in the sunbeam. In *gay motes* we have an instance of the figure *Pathetic Fallacy*, in which inanimate objects are treated with animal feelings. *People*—to fill, permeate. The use of this word sustains the comparison between the motes and the 'shapes' that haunt the 'idle brain'. The particles of dust in a pencil of rays always move up and down, as if they were so many living beings. Hence the appropriateness of the verb 'people' here.

9 *Likest*—Superlative of the adjective 'like.' Modern idiom requires 'most like,' most resembling.

*Hovering dreams*—Like birds over a sleeping person—i.e., fickle and changeable. The idea is that dreams do not settle in our minds but only hover round, so that we are only semi-conscious of the subjects of our dreams.

10 *Fickle*—changeable. *Fickle pensioners*. The dreams are called 'fickle' or *inconstant*, as they do not always attend sleep. *Pensioners*—attendants who receive a fixed and regular payment, *hired* followers.

*Morpheus*, the son of *Somnus*, the Sleep-God, represented in Greek Mythology as a king whose retinue (train) consists of Dreams. "The name means literally 'the Shaper,' he who creates those shapes or images seen in dreams. Morpheus was generally represented with a cup in one hand, and in the other a bunch of poppies, from which opium is prepared: hence the word 'morphia'—*Bell.*

But hail thou Goddess, sage and holy,  
Hail divinest Melancholy!

Whose saintly visage is too bright  
To hit the sense of human sight,

11-22 *But hail descended*—An invocation to *contemplation* in striking contrast with lines 11-24, *L'Allegro*. Observe *melancholy* is here used in quite a different sense, meaning 'Meditation' or 'Contemplation'.

11 *Hail*—I hail or welcome thee. Etymologically 'health to you'. This form of salutation is now confined to poetical compositions only. The word is cognate with *hale*, *heal*, *whole*, etc.

*Sage and holy*—wise and pure-minded, whereas Mirth is *gay* and *free*.

12 *Divinest*—Most god-like, most bright and pure like a god. Mark that the superlative degree here does not imply any comparison, but simply denotes a high degree of the attribute.

*Melancholy*—Meditation or contemplation—not the same *Melancholy* whom *L'Allegro* banishes from his presence which is *lowness* of spirits.

13-14 *Whose saintly sight*—(1) Too dazzling to be perceived by mortal eyes, or (2) Too dazzling to *suit* or agree with mortal vision. The meaning is much the same.—The saintly visage of Divinest Melancholy is surrounded by a halo of bright effulgence which dazzles the sight of mortal men and darkens their vision—like the rays of the noon-day sun.

13 *Saintly visage*—angelic face.

14 *To hit the sense*, &c.—to suit the mortal vision. *To hit* = to meet, an obsolete sense.





And therefore to our weaker view  
 O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue.

15

15-16 *And therefore hue*—And hence looks to our dimmer feebler mortal sight covered over with a black or dark colour, which best suits the countenance of firm, steady Wisdom. Milton here gives a poetic explanation of the popular idea of Melancholy being associated with blackness or gloominess—the literal meaning of the word also being ‘black bile’ (see Notes to L’Allegro, line 1). ‘Melancholy’ or Contemplation is really something pure, bright and divine and the invariable companion of wisdom, but foolish mortals cannot see it in its proper light, and to their eyes, dazzled by its excessive brilliance as it were, it appears black or gloomy,—implying that foolish people regard the mind of the wise, thoughtful gloomy—unable to perceive the light of knowledge that really illumines it from within.

15 *Weaker view*—feebler power of vision. *Weaker than what*—According to some the adjective here is used “absolutely,” as *dearest* above. But it may imply *weaker than what would have been if it to endure the light of the truest Melancholy*.

16 *O'erlaid*—Laid on covered over. *Staid*—Steady, firm.

*Wisdom hue*—The colour that best suits wisdom. A black or dark complexion is generally regarded as agreeing well with the thoughtful, solemn gloomy appearance of a wise man. Blackness is associated with wisdom.

Observe how cleverly the poet turns the blackness of melancholy, which L’Allegro hates so much into an attribute of *Il Penseroso*’s praise.

Black, but such as in esteem  
 Prince Memnon's sister might beseem.

18

17-21 *Black . offended*—Thy saintly visage does indeed appear to our weaker view, black, but it is such a black complexion as might well be, in the opinion of men, worthy of the sister of Memnon, the fairest of warriors or even the Ethiopian Queen Cassiope herself, who was transformed into a star for her presumption in boasting of her beauty as surpassing that of the Nereids.

17 *Black, etc*—She is black, but her blackness is such as might become the sister of Prince Memnon. *As in esteem* = as in the estimation of men.

18 *Memnon*—Some say he was the son of Tithonus and Aurora—the fairest of warriors who fought on the Trojan side against the Greeks, and was killed by Achilles. Others mention him as an Ethiopian king, noted for his beauty though of a dark complexion. By 'Prince Memnon's sister,' the poet means, the most beautiful Ethiopian lady.' Others say, Prince Memnon actually had a sister called Hemara. But no such special reference is intended by the poet. *Beseem*—suit; be worthy of, become





Or that starr'd Ethiop queen that strove

To set her beauty's praise above

20

The Sea-Nymphs, and their powers offended

Yet thou art higher far descended

19. *Starr'd Ethiop queen*—Cassiope, wife of Cephæus, king of Ethiopia. Milton makes her boast of her own beauty, but a different version of the legend makes her boast of the beauty of her daughter, Andromeda, as exceeding that of the Sea Nymphs. Neptune offended at her presumption sent a sea-monster to ravage Ethiopia. The people in despair consulted an oracle, who advised giving over Andromeda to the sea-monster. She was chained to a rock to be devoured by the sea-monster. Perseus in the meantime appeared on the scene, killed the monster, liberated Andromeda and married her. After death, Cassiope and Andromeda were placed among the stars or as the story runs, transformed into stars. Hence, *starr'd*

20-21 *To set offended*—The full construction is To set her beauty's praise above (that of) the Sea-Nymphs, and (by so doing) offended the powers (divinities.) i.e. to boast of her beauty as surpassing that of the Nereids.

The Sea-Nymphs = the Nereids, the fairest race of the demigods. Powers—divinities.

22. *Higher far descended*—far more nobly born. i.e. Thou art of a nobler origin than Prince Memnon or the Ethiop Queen.

Thee bright-hair'd Vesta, long of yore,  
 To solitary Saturn bore,  
 His daughter she (in Saturn's reign,  
 Such mixture was not held a stain).

25

23-24 *Thee bright-hair'd bore*—Thou art the daughter Vesta, the bright-haired goddess of pure domestic life by the solitary and morose God Saturn

*Vesta*—The mythology is the poet's own. Vesta among the Romans, was the goddess of hearth or domestic bliss. In her temples, a fire was always kept burning on the altar by *virgin* priestesses who gave themselves up to her service. By making her the mother of Melancholy Milton signifies that the melancholy of Il Penseroso is not the gloominess of the misanthrope nor the unhappiness of the man of impure heart, but the contemplative disposition of a pure and sympathetic soul

*Long of yore*—Long years ago. 'Of yore' is an adverbial phrase like 'of old' and is modified by 'long'

24 *Solitary Saturn*—Saturn the son of Uranus and Terra and father of Jupiter, was regarded by the Romans as the most ancient divinity and the introducer of the habits of civilized life. He is called 'solitary' either because he devoured his own offspring or because he was dethroned by his sons. Making 'solitary Saturn' the father of Melancholy Milton means to say that Melancholy comes from Solitude

25. *His daughter she* another reading is 'She his daughter' i.e. 'She, Vesta (was) his daughter'. As this may seem anomalous, the poet explains that such union between father and daughter was common among gods in Saturn's reign—mythological genealogy being above all law or (human) custom. The phrase 'She being his daughter' Nominative absolute

26 *Was not held a stain*—was not considered to be a reproach. "Mythological genealogies are apparently governed by no law" —*Bell*.  
*Stain*—Something morally wrong, reproach





Oft in glimmering bowers and glades  
He met her, and in secret shades  
Of woody Ida s inmost grove,  
While yet there was nò fear of Jove.  
Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,  
Sober, steadfast, and demure,

27 *Glimmering bowers*—Bowes only faintly lighted. *Glade* is an open space in a wood. Glimmer is a frequentative of 'gleam' i.e. gleaming at intervals. Thus, glimmering=looking bright now and then.

29 *Woody Ida*—probably refers to Mount Ida in the island of Crete, where Jupiter was brought up in a cave. Or it may refer to Mount Ida in Asia Minor. Here Saturn met Vesta before Jove (Jupiter) was born. Saturn's reign was called the golden age of Italy.

30 *Yet*=as yet, up to that time. In modern English *as* can be omitted before *yet* in this sense. When the principal verb of the sentence comes after *yet*, we can say, either, 'while *as yet*, there was no fear of Jove,' or, 'while *there was* not yet any fear of Jove.'

*Whilst yet fear of Jove*—i.e. long before Jove was born Saturn was dethroned by his sons and his realm distributed by lot between them—Jove got Heaven; Neptune, the Sea, and Pluto, the lower world.

31 *Pensive Nun*—Melancholy, being the daughter of Vesta, is properly called a 'nun' i.e. a woman who devotes herself to celibacy and seclusion. *Pensive*=thoughtful, literally, one who weighs every word before it is spoken. (L. *pendo*, to weigh.)

31 *Devout and pure*—*Devout*—~~owed~~ devoted to religious exercises, devoted to god; pious, holy. *Pure*—immaculate, chaste.

32 *Sober*—calm and self-restrained. *Steadfast*—Constant, firm, resolute; not to be moved from her high and resolute character.

*Demure*—In modern English, means, 'affectedly modest.' But Milton uses it in the primary sense of 'modest.' It comes from French *de* (hoin) + *meurs*=of (good) manners. Cf. *debonair* in L'Allegro line 24.

All in a robe of darkest grain,  
 Flowing with majestic train,  
 And sable stole of cypress lawn,  
 Over thy decent shoulders drawn.

35.

33. *All*—Wholly Adverb modifying the phrase "in a robe of darkest grain"

*Grain*—Dye or colour, *darkest grain* = "not, a mourning black, or a dull neutral tint, but the violet shade of purple" *Grain* originally meant, a seed or kernel, then any small object like seed, then any minute being, then an insect of the genus coccus, "the dried body or rather ovium of which furnishes a variety of red dyes", then the colours themselves. Hence *grain* is used by Milton and other English poets for Tyrian purple

As the colour obtained from grain was peculiarly durable, or as it is technically called, a 'fast or fixed dye', *ingrain* was used for deep-dyed, "fast"—*Hales*

34. *Flowing* &c.—the train sweeping majestically behind

35. *And sable stole*, &c.—And dressed in a black scarf of fine linen crape. *Sable stole*—black robe. *Stole*—A stole was a veil which covered the head and shoulders. Milton here uses *stole* in the sense of hood or veil. The stole (Lat *stola*) worn by Roman ladies was a long flounced robe, reaching to the feet, short-sleeved, and girded round the waist. Milton, however, means a hood or veil, which was first passed round the neck and then over the face: such a stole was worn to denote mourning. The word is now used only of a long narrow scarf, fringed at both ends, and worn by ecclesiastics. *Cypress lawn* = crape of the finest kind made in Cyprus. *Cypris* = Some derive it from L. *crispus*, curled; while others maintain that the name *cypress* was given to the cloth which was first manufactured in the island of Cyprus (cf *Calico* from Calicut, *Muslin* from Moussul, *Gauze* from Gaza, &c.) *Lawn* is a kind of fine linen (from L. *luna*, wool) quite a different word from lawn, meaning a grassy plot which comes from A. S. *laund*.

36. *Decent*—Beautiful; graceful; becoming.





Come ; but keep thy wonted state,  
With even step, and musing gait,  
And looks commercing with the skies,  
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes .

37-44. *Keep state*—Maintain your usual majestic and dignified manner, preserve thy accustomed dignity.

37. *Wonted state*—Usual stately manner.

*Wonted*—accustomed, habitual.

38. *Even step*—steady measured pace

*Musing gait*—thoughtful contemplative manner of walking. Contrast the manner in which *Il Penseroso* bids Melancholy come, with that in which *L'Allegro* wishes Mirth to appear. A *tripping gait* bespeaks full of youth, while a *mus*ing *gait* is associated with wisdom. *Gait*—is noun from 'go' = manner of going or walking

*Looks...skies*—eyes turned towards heaven

39 *And looks commercing*—Holding communion with God, or, with your eyes turned towards Heaven, in religious meditation. The characteristic look of melancholy is sad. The poet refers to this in l. 43, below. *Commercing*—holding intercourse with, communing ; The use of the word 'commerce' has been restricted in two ways—(1) by being applied only to trade, whereas Shakespeare, Milton, and others use it of any kind of intercourse, and (2) by being used only as a noun, whereas Milton used it as verb and noun. He also accents it here on the second syllable—*Bell*.

40 *Thy rapt...eyes*—Thy enraptured spirit being plainly discernible in thoughtful expression of thine eyes; the profoundly meditative nature of your soul wholly absorbed in devout contemplation being writ large on your eyes. *Rapt*—enraptured ; *carried away* with joy. *Soul*—nom. absolute

There, held in holy passion still,  
 Forget thyself to marble, till  
 With a sad leaden downward cast  
 Thou fix them on the earth as fast.

44.

41. *There still*—Held fast in that calm motionless position of devout emotion, continuing in that calm mood of devout ecstasy. *There*—In that mood or position. *Held*—enraptured, wholly absorbed. *Holy passion*—devout or sacred emotion. *Passion* (i.e. *passio* I feel) is used literally in the sense of 'excessive feeling or emotion' of course, spiritual emotion.

42. *Forget thyself to marble*—are lost in meditation, become as much unconscious of whatever passes around, as if you were a mere marble statue

Compare Milton's famous Sonnet on Shakespeare :—

"Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,  
 Dost make us marble with too much conceiving".

*Epitaph on Shakespeare*

42-44. *Till...fast*—Until thou turn thine eyes downward in deep sadness towards the earth and gaze at it as steadfastly as thou didst at the skies. The eyes when turned away from heaven down to the earth naturally change from their serene joyful expression to a sad leaden cast.

43. *With a sad leaden* &c.—with the eyes cast downwards in sadness, or deep musing. *Leaden* eye betokens excess of thoughtfulness. *Leaden*—heavy, sullen

44. *Fix them &c.*—'Fix' is in the subjunctive mood, after *till*; hence it is uninflected. The meaning is that Melancholy is to fix her eyes as firmly on the ground, as they were previously fixed on heaven

And join with thee calm Peace and Quiet,  
Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet,  
And hears the muses in a ring  
Aye round about Jove's altar sing,

45

45-50 *Melancholy is invoked, and her form and attitude described, the poet now begins to enumerate her attendants.*; Observe how the companions of Melancholy are in sharp contrast with those of Mirth. Peace, Quiet and Leisure and Ascetic mode of life are invoked as aids to contemplation

45. *Peace and Quiet*—Peace is the absence of discord, and quiet, that of any noise whatsoever

46 *Spare Fast*—Temperance, abstention from food; Milton here speaks of his own habits *Spare Fast*; a frugal life, associated with a 'lean body' Milton always followed 'plain living and high thinking'

*Doth diet*—dines with; The modern idiom requires 'diets and hears', or 'doth diet and (doth) hear'. The poet suggests that temperance is a heavenly virtue, and none but the temperate can properly enjoy music or poetry or the productions of the fine arts and sciences.

47-48. *And hears... sing*—and listens to the Goddesses of Poetry and Music as they ever sing round the altar of Jupiter,—meaning that those who lead a plain, frugal, simple life of calm meditation, scrupulously abstaining from gross sensual pleasures, only enjoy the pure ennobling delights of the highest types of poetry and music.

*Muses*—In Classical mythology, they were the nine daughters of Jupiter. They presided over the different kinds of poetry and the arts and sciences. They lived on Mount Olympus. Their names were: 1. *Calliope* (Epic Poetry) 2. *Clio* (History) 3. *Euterpe* (Lyric poetry) 4. *Thalia* (Comedy) 5. *Melpomene* (Tragedy) 6. *Terpsichore* (Dance and Song) 7. *Erato* (Love poetry) 8. *Polyhymnia* (Hymns) 9. *Urania* (Astronomy)

*In a ring*—Making a circle, forming a choir. This again is an adaptation of the common imagery of the angels singing hallelujahs before the throne of God.

48. *Aye*—for ever, always, for all time.

And add to these retired Leisure,  
 That in trim gardens takes his pleasure ;  
 But, first and chiefest, with thee bring  
 Him that yon soars on golden wing,  
 Guiding the fiery-wheeled throne,  
 The Cherub Contemplation,  
 And the mute Silence hist along,  
 'Less Philomel will deign a song,

50

55

49. *Retired Leisure*—Leisure or freedom from any business of worldly nature is here personified and invoked as one of the fit aids to pensiveness.

50. *That...pleasure*—that amuses himself in neat, well-kept gardens. To the man of leisure nothing can give so much pleasure as the beauties of a nice garden

*Trim*—beautiful; with the plants regularly pruned and arranged. *His* Of Leisure This *his* is not used for *its* as frequently in Milton, 'Leisure' being personified as a male companion of Melancholy.

51. *First and chiefest*—First and foremost; in the first place; above all. "Chiefest" is common in Milton though not permissible in Modern English—the word itself denoting the superlative notion of highest.

52. *Yon*—(adv.) yonder.

52-53. *Him that yon soars, the Cherub Contemplation*—The angel of Contemplation that flies high up in yonder Heavens, bearing up on its golden wings the Sapphire throne-chariot of God. Here Milton, with his usual bold flights of imagination, ingeniously mixes up two different imageries—one biblical and the other medieval. Ezekiel's vision of the sapphire throne-chariot of God, borne on the golden wings of four cherubim who were all bright and dazzling eyes, and formed its wheels, with a burning fire in their midst, underneath the throne, is taken from *Ezekiel*. And in calling one of these, cherubim Contemplation, he refers to the medieval conception of Hierarchies or choirs of angels, of which the cherubim formed the second, and their peculiar faculty was believed to be "knowledge contemplation of things divine." This medieval conception has in his own inimitable way, grafted on to the Biblical of the chariot of fire, to suit his own purpose—viz. of





representing allegorically that holy contemplation is like the good angel who is all purity and brightness and is chiefly instrumental in opening the inward spiritual eye of man—the mind's eye—to things divine.

*Golden wing*—Masson says: "A daring use of the great vision in *Ezekiel*, Chap. 10 of the sapphire throne, the wheels of which were four cherubs, each wheel or cherub full of eyes all over, while in the midst of them, and underneath the throne, was a burning fire. Milton, whether on any hint from previous Biblical commentaries I know not, ventures to name one of these cherubs who guide the fiery wheelings of the visionary throne. He is the Cherub Contemplation. It was by the serene faculty named contemplation that one attained the clearest notion of divine things, mounted, as it were, into the very blaze of the Eternal. The golden wing on which the Cherub soars, is *Imagination*."

55. *Hist along*—'Hist' is now used only as an Interjection, like its cognate words *hush* and *whist*. Here it is used as a verb in the Imperative mood. The meaning is "Bring silently along."

56. *Less*=unless=*on* + *less*. The :*un*' of 'unless' 'until' is not the negative prefix, but a form of the A. S. preposition 'on'; so that 'unless you go'=*on less* you go, *in the event of your going the less*; so "until he comes"=*on* till he comes, *on or during* the time till he comes, hence *up to* the time of his coming.

*Philomel*—is the poetic word for nightingale (Gk. *Philomela*). According to the legend, she was the daughter of Pandion, King of Attica, her sister Procne was married to Tereus, King of Thrace. He being seized with a passion for *Philomela*, dishonoured her. The sisters in revenge slew his son Itys and set his flesh before him to eat. Discovering this, he pursued them with an axe, and they were transformed by Jupiter—Procne into a swallow, *Philomela* into a nightingale and Tereus into a hoopoe.

*Deign a song*=be pleased to sing.

In her sweetest, saddest plight,  
 Smoothing the rugged brow of Night,  
 While Cynthia checks her dragon yoke  
 Gently o'er the accustomed oak

60

57 *in her plight* - in that strain of hers in which the saddest notes are sung with the sweetest melody. Saddest sweetest.—Fig. Oxymoron

57 *Plight*—strain. Literally, something plaited or interwoven and hence applied to a strain of sounds interwoven, as in the nightingale's song

58. *Smoothing, night* "Softening the stern aspect of Night, taking away the grim horrors of darkness, making the dark and dreary night pleasant with her sweet melody. Music makes a dark night less grim. *Rugged* = wrinkled

59-60 *While Cynthia, oak*—The song is so sweet and charming that the Moon herself pulls up the dragons yoked to her chariot and stops in her course over the oak in which the Nightingale is wont to sing. Whom does *her* refer to? Evidently to Cynthia as Night is masculine. Here again Milton takes liberty with the classical mythology which gives dragons to Night to draw his carriage and not to Cynthia (the moon)

*Cynthia*—The Greek Artemis, the moon goddess just as Cynthius was her brother Apollo the sun god. Both of them were so called from their birth-place—Mount Cynthus, in the isle of Delos. She is represented as driving a chariot drawn by four stags. The Latin poets give dragons only to Ceres the goddess of plenty. Shakespeare more correctly speaks of the "dragons of the night"

60 *The accustomed oak* the oak where the nightingale was accustomed to sing at night, and where the poet perhaps had often listened to it. He may refer (as Masson suggests) to some particular oak over which he had himself often watched the moon, thus giving a personal touch to his bold fancy. The use of the definite article 'the' favours this view





Sweet bird, that shunn'st the noise of folly,  
Most musical, most melancholy,  
Thee, chauntress, oft the woods among  
I woo, to hear thy even-song

64

61-72 Observe how the nightingale the most musical, the most melancholy of birds, is the favourite of *Il Penseroso*—its saddest sweetest strains according so well with his deep meditative spirit standing out in bold contrast with the gay, lively music of the lark which startles dull night and *in spite of sorrow* comes down to *l. Allegro's* window to say good-morrow (*L. Allegro*, line 41-8)

61 *That shunnest...folly*—That withdraws from the turmoil of the foolish work-a-day world to the quiet recess of the wood

62 *Most musical, most melancholy* whose strains are sweetest and at the same time saddest The nightingale singing in the darkness and solitude of night naturally strikes a sympathetic chord in the heart of the pensive man Cf. Shelley's oft quoted lines

Our sincerest laughter  
With some pain is fraught,  
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought  
*I, a Skylark*

63 *Chauntress*—*Queen of chaunter, songstress, chaunt* sing 'To 'enchant,' is 'to charm by singing

64 *Woo*—Eagerly seek *Even-song* Evening is the time when the life of the thoughtful man really begins The bustle and activity of the day is not suited to his mood

And, missing thee, I walk unseen—

65

On the dry smooth-shaven green.

To behold the wandering moon.

Riding near her highest noon,

65 *Missing thee*—i.e. On those occasions when I do not hear thy song. The participle has the force of a subjunctive here; so, *missing thee* = 'If I miss thee.'

*Unseen*—unobserved by any one i.e. all to myself. *Il Penseroso* prefers solitude to society, the delight of *L'Allegro*.

*N.B.*—As *not unseen* (line 57, *L'Allegro*) is in natural contrast to *unseen*, it has been argued that *Il Penseroso* must have been written before *L'Allegro*.

66. *Dry smooth-shaven green*—Cf. Shakespeare "Short-grass d green," i.e. the meadow where the grass has been newly cut so as to make it perfectly smooth. 'Dry' signifies 'not yet wet with the dew.'

67. *The wandering moon*—A favourite expression with Latin and Italian poets. The moon is called 'wandering', because, unlike the sun, she has no fixed course of her own.

Cf.

(1) "Swifter than the wandering moon"

Midsummer Night's Dreams, IV I 103

(2) "Art thou pale for weariness  
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth.  
*Wandering companionless*  
Among the stars that bear a different birth?"

Shelley—*To the Moon*

68. *Her highest noon*—at her zenith or highest position; the highest point of her ascension.

*Noon*—Literally means *ninth* (*L. nonus*.) "The church services held at the ninth hour of the day (3 P.M.) were called *nones*. When these were changed to midday, the word noon was used to denote that hour, and hence its present use."—*Bell*.





Like one that had been led astray  
 Through the heaven's wide pathless way;  
 And oft, as if her head she bowed,  
 Stooping through a fleecy cloud  
 Oft, on a plat of rising ground,  
 I hear the far-off curfew sound,

72 *Stooping*—"He alludes here to that curious optical illusion by which, as the clouds pass over the moon, it seems to be she, not they, that is in motion. This is peculiarly observable when the wind is high, and the clouds are driven along with rapidity"—*Keightley*.

72 *Fleecy*—Thin, and looking like fleece

73. *Plat of rising ground*—a small plot of level ground on the top of a hillock. The level surface of a mound or hillock. *Plat* is another form of plot. *Plat*—(*plot*) *plat-form*, *plate*, *place*, *flat*, &c are all cognate words.

74 *Curfew*—the evening bell [Fr. *Couvre*, (cover) *feu* (fire)]. A term applied to a bell that was rung in England in Norman times at eight or nine in the evening, as a signal that all lights and fires should be extinguished. The custom was probably still in force in Milton's time.

*Sound* = toll, Infinitive mood, after, hear

Over some wide-water'd shore 75  
 Swinging slow with sullen roar,  
 Or, if the air will not permit,  
 Some still removèd place will fit,  
 Where glowing embers through the room  
 Teach light to counterfeit a gloom. 80

75 *Offer* = across. *Some wide-watered shore* - "Over some shore and the wide piece of water it edges. Our old writers often speak of "a water," meaning a lake or a river. Milton here may be thinking of the Thames. (*Hale*)

But does not the adjective *some* show that the poet is not referring to any particular shore?

76 *Swinging roar* - tolling with a slow heavy moan as if sounding the knell of parting day. Gray had these lines in his mind when he wrote "The curlew tolls the knell of parting day &c

*Swinging slow* - vibrating slowly. A slow music betokens sadness whereas a rapid strain bespeaks joy. *Sullen* - solemn. The meaning is, the sound increases in solemnity as it reaches my ear over a wide piece of water.

77 *On if permit* - On if wind and weather will not allow of my going out. If the weather be foul. *And Weather*.

78 *Some fit* - Some quiet place far from busy haunts of men will suit me. *Some still removèd place* - Some quiet and retired spot. "Removèd" is the same word as *remote* - moved back and means retired, or distant. Milton here uses the word in the former sense.

*Will fit* - will be suited to my mood.

79-80 *Where gloom* - Where the red hot ashes of the fire fill the room with a sort of hazy, indistinct light.

*Glowing embers* - the burning red-hot ashes; "through the room" is an adv. phrase modifying "to counterfeit."

80. *Teach light &c.* - The red hot ashes merely serve to make the darkness visible. - Fire is bright. But there being no other light in the room but the fire in the grate, it fills the room with a hazy indistinct light. This is poetically described as the red-hot ashes teaching light to feign darkness.





Far from all resort of mirth,  
Save the cricket on the hearth,\*  
Or the bellman's drowsy charm  
To bless the doors from nightly harm  
Or let my lamp, at midnight hour,  
Be seen in some high lonely tower,

81 *Far from . mirth*—far away from festive scenes

82-84 *Save the . harm*--where the only sound is that of the cricket hovering on the fireplace, or the watchman drawling forth in sleepy accents scraps of pious poetry by way of making the doors of the houses proof against nocturnal evils, such as theft, fire &c.

83 *The bellman's . drowsy . charm . Bellman*—Watchman, so called because it was his duty to tell the hours by ringing a bell *Drowsy charm*—snatches of pious poetry supposed to have the *charm* or *spell* of scaring away thieves, robbers, murderers and other evils, drawled forth in sleepy accents. These blessings were uttered half in sleep, hence they are called 'drowsy'. The following from Herrick's 'Hesperides' the speaker being a *Bellman*, may serve as a specimen of the 'charms' alluded to

"From noise of scare--fired rest ye free,  
From murders benedictie:  
From all mischances that may fight  
Your pleasing slumbers in the night,  
Mercy secure ye all and keep  
The Goblin from ye, while ye sleep  
Past one o'clock, and almost two,  
My masters all, good day to you."

84. *Nightly*—nocturnal, during the night, and not 'night by night.'

85-96 *Or let element*--Or let me spend the night in the lofty tower of some solitary mansion in the country studying Astronomy or ancient Philosophy or Drama

Milton here has in his mind the *Timaeus* and *Phædo* of Plato—discourses on the state of the soul after death.

Where I may oft out-watch the Bear,  
 With thrice-great Hermes, or unsphere  
 The spirit of Plato, to unfold  
 What worlds or what vast regions hold  
 The immortal mind that hath forsook  
 Her mansion in this fleshy nook,

90

87 *Where I out-watch the Bear*—Where I may often watch the constellation of the Great Bear till it disappears in the day-light. *Out-watch*—keep awake or sit up, watching the Great Bear till it is no longer visible. The Great Bear does not set in northern latitudes below the horizon. Therefore 'to out-watch it' would mean watching it throughout the night till it becomes invisible in the day-light. *Out-watch* = watch *beyond*, *out* being used as in *out-umber*, *out-wit*, '*out-Macaulay Macaulay*' i.e. surpass Macaulay in his powers of rhetoric, '*out-Herod Herod*'—surpass or excel Herod himself in wanton cruelty.

88 *With Hermes*—spend the night with, (i.e. in studying the works of) the great Egyptian philosopher, Hermes Trismegistus. Hermes Trismegistus (thrice-great) was an ancient Egyptian philosopher named Thoth or Theut, with whom the Greeks identified their God Hermes (Mercury). He was called *thrice great*, because he was a great *King*, a great *priest* and a great *philosopher*. The Neo-Platonists regarded him as the source of all knowledge, even Pythagoras and Plato being supposed to have owed their vast knowledge to him.

Milton is here possibly thinking of the *Pamander*, a work attributed to Hermes, treating of the creation of the world, the deity, the human soul, &c.

88-90. *Unsphere the spirit of Plato*—Bring down the soul of Plato from its sphere in heaven; bring his philosophy down from heaven, i.e. find out his doctrines by carefully studying his works. *Unsphere*—is a Miltonic word (coined in analogy with *un-lock*, *un-fasten*, *un-load* &c. '*un*' denoting the reversal of the action denoted by the verb following) meaning, 'to bring down from its sphere,' to call down from its place in heaven, to make it solve the difficult problems of life and death, the nature of the soul, &c. *Briefly to study Plato's philosophy*,





89 *To unfold, . . . neck*—to unravel the mystery of Death and lay bare before men the nature of the spheres or vast spaces that contain the souls of men after they have 'shuffled off the mortal coil' with a view to unfold those worlds which, according to the Platonic Philosophy, contain the souls of the departed. "The allusion is to one of Plato's *Dialogues*, the *Phædo*, in which he discusses the state of the souls after the death of the body -- *Bell* . . .

91 *The immortal mind*—the indestructible soul. *Forsaken* = forsaken

92 *Her mansion*—her temporary abode, the literal sense in which it is commonly used in Shakespeare and even later poets. Cf. Gray's *Elegy*

"Can storied urn or animated bust

Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath"

The word is now generally applied to large, splendid dwelling house.

*Her* is used for 'mind,' as *mens* (mind) in Latin is feminine. *Flushy neck*—either the human body or this earth

And of those Demons that are found  
In fire, air, flood, or underground,

94

93-96. *And of those Demons* - The construction is, "And make the spirit of Plato (to) unfold of *te* reveal the truths or real facts about demons &c."

The meaning is, Of those spirits that dominate Fire (Salamanders) Air (Sylphs), Water (Nymphs) and the nether regions (Gnomes) and who exercise a sympathetic influence on heavenly bodies and the elements.

94. *In fire, air &c.*—The spirits of fire are Salamanders of air, Sylphs; of the flood, Undines or Nymphs, of nether regions, Gnomes or Kobolds. These were all good spirits. Pope makes use of this belief in the existence of different spirits in the different elements in his mock-heroic poem of the *Rape of the Lock*.

"For when the Fair in all their pride expire,  
To their first elements their souls retire  
The sprites of fiery Termagants in Flame  
Mount up, and take a *Salamander's* name  
Soft yielding minds to water glide away,  
And sip, with *Nymphs*, their elemental tea,  
The graver Prude sinks downward to a *Gnome*,  
In search of mischief still on earth to roam  
The light coquettes in *Sylphs* aloft repair,  
And sport and flutter in the fields of Air,





Whose power hath a true consent 95  
 With planet or with element  
 Sometimes let gorgeous Tragedy  
 In sceptred pall come sweeping by, 98

95. *Consent*—Sympathy, connection or influence. (L. *con* with, and *sento* to feel) the demons are in sympathetic relation with certain planets and elements.

*True consent*—real sympathy.

*Hath a true consent with*—can exercise much influence over.

96. *With planet, element*—the belief in astrology lingered in Christian Europe up to the seventeenth century. Shakespeare's dramas are full of references to astrological dogmas. Dryden was himself a believer in the art. Each spirit was supposed to be relegated to that planet and that element with which it had a mysterious harmony or sympathetic relationship. Thus a man of jovial disposition would have his spirit transferred to the planet Jupiter (another name of Jove), one of an active temperament, to Mercury and so forth. Milton himself in his P. L. improves upon this superstition and represents the fallen angels as spirits presiding over earth, air, fire, &c.

*Element*—The main constituent of matter supposed to fall under the four heads of fire, air, earth and water. Hindu Philosophy recognises five elements, while modern Chemistry enumerates as many as 75 elements.

97-102. *Sometime . . . by*—At other times, let me study the splendid tragedies of the master-dramatists of old, of which the heroes appear in royal robes, sceptre in hand. *Sometime*—on some occasion.

Il Penseroso now touches upon his six attraction—the study of the greatest and most solemn tragic writers.

*Gorgeous*—Splendid, in which the characters appear in brilliant costume,—a transferred epithet, as it applies properly to the characters in the play.

98. *Sceptred pall*—Kingly robe; that is, in sceptre and pall. *Pall*—the Roman palla, a shawl-like garment thrown over the shoulders of Kings and Queens in Greek tragedies. Professor Hales suggests that "Scepter'd pall" may here mean, "with pall and with sceptre" (i. e.), two things are expressed as one, just as one thing is expressed as two, which latter figure is called Hendyadis.

*Come sweeping by*—pass along with the train sweeping the ground.

Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,  
 Or the tale of Troy divine. 100  
 (Or what (though rare) of later age  
 Ennobled hath the buskin'd stage  
 But, O sad Virgin! that thy power  
 Might raise Musæus from his bower.

97. *Presenting* - Representing, exhibiting, portraying.

*Thebes* - The capital of Boeotia, and the most celebrated city in the mythical ages of Greece. It was the scene of the tragic fate of Œdipus, and of the war of the 'Seven against Thebes.' Milton here possibly refers to the tragedy of *Œdipus* by Sophocles.

*Pelops' line*—Pelops gave his name to the Peloponnesus. He was the father of Atreus and great-grand-father of Agamemnon. The fortunes of his house form the subject of many tragedies by Æschylus and Sophocles.

100. *The tale of Troy divine*—May be interpreted in two ways. (1) The divine tale of Troy. The *Iliad*, Homer's masterpiece—the order of the Adjectives being reversed as in 'native wood-notes wild' (L. Allegro, 140) 'divine' meaning 'heavenly,' 'grand,' 'superb,' or (2) The tale of divine Troy—divine, because it was said to have been founded by the God Poseidon or Neptune and also because in the Trojan war all the gods and goddesses took side with one or the other party.

101-102. *Or what stage*—or representatives of those characters though of a rare order, of a later time which have added so much grace and dignity to the tragic stage—referring undoubtedly to the tragedies of Shakespeare.

These lines certainly refer to Shakespeare's great tragedies, and the words 'though rare' probably express Milton's sense both of Shakespeare's superiority over his contemporaries, and of the comparative barrenness of the English tragic drama until Shakespeare arose. We thus see clearly that the language applied to Shakespeare in *L. Allegro*, 133, referred to one aspect of the poet, here we have the other.—*Bell*

*What* (a comp. Rel.) connected with 'presenting,' in line 99.

*Later age*—referring to the age of Elizabeth which was adorned by a host of dramatists. *Later*—in comparison with the ancient Greek Tragedies.





102 *Ennobled*=dignified, *Buskin'd*<sup>8</sup> *Stage*--the tragic drama Stage trodden by *buskins* or *buck's skin*—a kind of high-heeled shoes made of buck's skin worn by Greek tragic actors in order to add to their stature and so to their dignity—hence Tragic drama or Tragedy Compare these lines with those in L'Allegro where Comedy is referred to by 'Jouson's learned sock' The *sock* of Comedy was a sort of slipper.

103 *Sad Virgin*—i.e. Melancholy Maiden, cf. "Pensive Nun," line 31

*That thy power*—Would that thy power or I would (wish) that thy power, &c., an optative exclamation, very common in poetry

Cf. Cowper's *Mother's Picture*

O that those lips had language<sup>9</sup>

= *How eagerly I wish* that those lips &c.

103-108 An invocation to Music of a far higher and diviner strain than that invoked by L'Allegro

104-108 *Might raise seek*--might bring back to us the lost poems of Musæus, and of Orpheus whose pathetic strains moved even the non-hearted Pluto to tears and made the Hades restore to Orpheus his dead wife Eurydice

*Might raise bowers*—might call the lost poems of Musæus back from the retreat in which he lived Milton here expresses a wish that his sacred hymns could be recovered

*Musæus*—one of the most ancient mythical poets of Greece and said to be a son of Orpheus He was the author of many sacred hymns and a lyrical description of the Gods of Greek mythology

*Bowers*=retreat, the 'sphere,' in the lower world, where the departed soul of Musæus now rests

Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing 105  
 Such notes as, warbled to the string, .  
 Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,  
 And made Hell grant what love did seek ,

105. *Orpheus*—See notes on L'Allegro, l. 145.

106 *Warbled to the string*—Sung to the accompaniment of the lyre, or any other stringed musical instrument. *Warbled*—sung. *To*—in harmony or accompaniment with *the string*—The lyre which is a *stringed* instrument.

106-108 *Such notes seek*—Such strains as, sung in accompaniment, with the lyre, melted even the iron-hearted Pluto to tears and for once made Hades give up its victim in the person of Eurydice whose spirit had passed there after death. The reference is to the story of Eurydice being recovered from the hands of Pluto who charmed with the sweet and sad strains of Orpheus granted him the boon of having his wife back (see notes on L'Allegro, line 150)

107. *Iron tears*—A kind of Transferred Epithet, tears from the eyes even of the *iron-hearted* (unrelenting) Pluto, the God of death.

108. *And made Hell seek*—and caused Hell to give what Orpheus's love for Eurydice had demanded, *viz*, the restoration of his wife to him, *i.e.* made Hell itself grant him the favour he sought out of love for his wife.





Or call up him that left half-told  
 The story of Cambuscan bold,  
 Of Camball, and of Algarsife,  
 And <sup>(31. 110)</sup> who had Canace to wife.

110

109-115 *Or call up...ride*—How eagerly do I wish that thy power might summon Chaucer back to life that he might complete the *Squire's Tale* which he left unfinished—treating of Cambus Khan, the brave Tartar king, of his sons, Algarsife and Camballo, and of the knight who suddenly rode into the palace on the Khan's brass steed with a charmed looking glass and gold ring in hand, and took the king's daughter Canace to wife.

109. *Call up him*—"Call," "raise" (l 104), and bid (l 105) are co-ordinate verbs. The poet here expresses a wish that Melancholy could call up Chaucer to finish his unfinished *Squire's Tale*. No doubt the reference to the lost poems of the earliest Greek poets suggested the unfinished tale of Chaucer which breaks off in the middle. The tale was continued and finished by Spenser in the *Faerie Queene*. Amongst the *Canterbury Tales* the *Squire's Tale* is conspicuous for a certain oriental richness of invention and of ornament.

The allusion here is explained by the following lines from the *Squire's Tale*

- "This noble King, this Tartar Cambuscan,  
 • Had two sonnes by Elfetā his wife,  
 Of which the eldest son hight Algarsife,  
 That other was ycleped Camballo  
 A daughter had this worthy king also,  
 That youngest was, and highte Canace.  
 • In at the hall door all suddenly  
 There came a knight upon a steed of brass,  
 And in his hand a broad mirror of glass  
 • Upon his thumb he had of gold a ring  
 And by his side a naked sword hanging."

\*110. *Cambuscan* = Cambus Khan. Chaucer also writes the two parts of the name as one word, but he properly accentuates it on the last syllable..

112. *And who* = And of him who.  
 • *Had to wife*—married.  
 • *To wife* = For a wife.

That own'd the virtuous ring and glass,  
 And of the wondrous horse of brass  
 On which the Tartar king did ride, 115  
 And if aught else great bards beside  
 In sage and solemn tunes have sung,  
 Of turneys, and of trophies hung,

113. *That owned*—who had in her possession. *Virtuous*—possessing virtue, i.e. strength and power—having supernatural powers.

*The virtuous ring and glass*—The king of Ind had sent the wondrous horse of brass as a present to Cambuscan and the mirror and the ring to his daughter Canace.

“By virtue of the *ring* the wearer could understand the language of birds and the medicinal power of all herbs. The *mirror* showed coming disasters and would reflect the falseness of subjects and of lovers while the wondrous horse of brass could convey any one who knew how to manage it any distance in one day and fly high up in the air like an eagle. Besides these wonders there was a *sword* which could cut through anything, and the wounds inflicted by which could be healed only by being stroked with the flat of it. —*Hales*.”

114. *And of the wondrous* &c. = and, the story of the wondrous, &c.

115. *The Tartar King*—Cambuscan.

116. *If aught else*—Whatever else, a Latinism. *Great bards besides*—(Other great poets. The poets referred to are Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser) &c. in whose romances Milton in his youth was deeply read.

117. *In sage and solemn tunes*—In wise and dignified verse, as that of the Spenserian stanza.

118. *Of turneys, &c.*—‘turneys’ = ‘tournaments.’ (Fi. *tournay*) Turneys—mock fights on horse back, so called from the swift *turning* of the horses in the combat. *Trophies* were ‘memorials’ of victory; arms and banners taken from a defeated enemy and hung up as memorial.





Of forests, and enchantments drear, *body of Enchanted Forest*  
 Where more is meant than meets the ear, *120*  
 Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career,  
 Till civil-suitèd Morn appeal,

119 *Enchantments drear*—The singing of magic verses with a view to place anybody under some spell

120. *Where more is meant &c.*—In which there is a deeper meaning than is apparent on the surface. Several editors quote Warton "Both Tasso and Ariosto pretend to an allegorical and mysterious meaning, and Tasso's *Enchanted Forest*, the most conspicuous fiction of the kind, may have been here intended." *Fairie Queene* is a noble spiritual allegory. (This line is a familiar quotation)

121 *Thus might &c.*—The construction is, "Thus, O' Night, oft see me in thy pale career" and the meaning is, let me be engaged in the above pursuits, *i.e.* in the study of Astronomy and the master-minds of old as well as of later times—throughout thy whole course 'Pale' = 'lacking light', 'dull'. The epithet 'pale' properly belongs to 'Night.'

*Pale career*—pale, wan, dusky white course. The career of night is called *pale* in reference to the dusky colour of the atmosphere in the starlight at night.

122. *Civil-suitèd*—soberly attired; quietly dressed in plain simple garb of a common citizen. *L'Allegro* hastens to meet the Sun starting on his grand course surrounded by thousands of liveried retainers, *Il Penseroso* wants Morn to appeal as a peaceful citizen.

*Civil*—lit 'belonging to a citizen,' from *L. Civis*, a citizen, hence when applied to dress, it means the simple, sober dress of a common citizen, as opposed to the brilliant gay uniform of the military man, or the solemn dark attire of the clergy

Not trick'd and frounced, as she was wont  
 With the Attic boy to hunt,  
 But kerchief'd in a comely cloud,  
 While rocking winds are piping loud,

125

123. *Tricked and frounced*—adorned with fine clothes and having the hair frizzled or curled, to *trick* is to dress out in finery, as in Lycidas; 170; *frounced* to frounce is first to wrinkle or frown, then to plait or twine; here it is to decorate. *Flounce* is the modern form of *frounce*. *Frounced*—adorned with curling locks of hair.

*As she was wont*—in the manner in which she was accustomed to appear.

124. *Attic boy*—Cephalus, the Athenian youth, of whom Aurora the goddess of dawn (Eos) was enamoured while he was stag-hunting on Mount Hymettus in Attica.

125. *Kerchief-veiled*; literally, having the head covered, Kerchief—French *couvre-chef* (cover head) being a veil for the head.

*Comely*—becoming; suitable

*Kerchief...cloud*—with her head covered only with a graceful cloud as with a handkerchief.

126. *While rocking winds loud*—while gusts of wind are swaying the branches of trees to and fro and making a shrill noise like that of a pipe.

*Piping*—Producing a loud whistling sound as from a pipe.





Or usher'd with a shower still,  
 When the gust hath blown his fill,  
 Ending on the rustling leaves,  
 With minute drops from off the eaves

130

127-130 *Or eaves*—or brought in with a noiseless gentle shower of rain, after the storm has blown its utmost, which ceases with drops of water dribbling every minute from the projecting eaves of my cottage on the rustling leaves

127 *Ushered in*—brought in, introduced, immediately preceded by.

*Shower still*—noiseless gentle shower, as explained by the next line, the rain is to come when the wind has ceased to blow. *Milton* is very fond of the use of the word *still* in the sense of *quiet, gentle*

128 *Hath blown his fill*—has exhausted itself, has ceased

*His fill* may be taken either as a Cognate Accusative, or as an Adverbial Adjunct to 'blown,' which is preferable. *His*=*its*. *His* for *it* is very common in Elizabethan literature. *It* was only beginning to be used in Milton's time and it is used only in three places in the whole of his poetry

129-30. *Ending on eaves*—The end of the shower being marked by drops falling at intervals. *Il Penseroso* has passed his night among books in a high tower. He is still there in the morning when it rains; and when the rain ceases, or is about to cease, he finds drops of rain still falling from the eaves of his tower on the rustling leaves below. *Ending* refers to 'shower'.

*Minute drops*—drops falling every minute (*i.e.*) constantly and at regular intervals. The meaning of this phrase varies according as we accent *minute* on the first or on the second syllable. If on the first, the meaning is, 'drops falling every minute or at short intervals,' as in *minute guns* &c. If on the second, the meaning is 'very small drops.' The first meaning is preferable. *Eaves*—projecting edges of the roof.

And, when the sun begins to fling  
 His flashing beams, me, Goddess, bring  
 To arched walks of twilight groves,  
 And shadows brown, that Sylvan loves  
 Of pine or monumental oak,  
 While the rude axe with heaved stroke

135

131-135 *And when haunt*—*Il Penseroso* does not care for the bright rays of the sun, and longs to escape from them into the some shady retreat at noon. 'O Goddess,' says he, "lead me into the shady walks of some bowel where the foliage of the trees keep out the dazzling rays of the sun and fill it with a faint subdued light as in twilight,—bower, full of shadows of a dusky brown colour—of which the Gods of the woods is so fond, cast by huge old oaks, standing memorials of by-gone times, which had never felt the sturdy blows of the rude wood-cutter scaring away the Sylvan Nymphs from their sacred resorts."

132. *Flaming*—*flashing*. 'begins to fling flaming beams' = begins to cast dazzling rays, i.e. shine brightly

133. *Arched*—Covered with overhanging branches forming as it were arches in vaults. *Walk*—paths to walk along. *Twilight groves*—groves having the faint subdued light, as in twilight

*Shadows brown*—the shadows cast on the ground are not deep black, but of a dusky brown colour owing to the sunlight falling upon the green foliage.

134. *Sylvan*—abbreviated form of 'Sylvanus,' (Lat Silva, wood) the god of fields and forests.

135. *Monumental oaks*—oaks that stand like tall monuments, forming as it were massive memorials of by-gone times; historic oak

136. *Rude axe with heaved stroke*—'Heaved'—up-lifted. The epithets in this line are joined to wrong substantives 'Rude' belongs to 'stroke' and 'heaved' to 'axe.' Fig. *Chiasmus* (i.e.) Reversal of the proper order of epithets.





Was never heard the Nymphs to daunt,  
 Or fright them from their hallow'd haunt.  
 There, in close covert by some brook,  
 Where no profane eye may look,  
 I hide me from day's garish eye,  
 While the bee with homed thigh,

140

137. *Nymphs*—beautiful goddesses who inhabited mountains, rivers &c Here, wood nymphs. *Daunt*—frighten

138. *Hallow'd haunt*—sacred retreat, abode sacred to them

139-141. *There, eye*—Shut me up O goddess, in some secluded retreat among those groves on the bank of some river against the bright rays of the noon-day sun, hidden away from the gaze of the vulgar unsympathetic crowd

139. *Close covert*—secret recess, sheltered spot

140. *No profane eye*—no unsympathetic eye Il Penseroso applies the epithet to worldly people who cannot enter into and sympathise with, his meditative mood

141. *Day's garish eye*—the bright eye of Day, 'the dazzling mid-day sun; *Garish*—lit 'that which makes one gaze or stare,' hence, dazzling, brilliant. 'The word is now used in the bad sense of 'gaudy'

142-146. *While sleep*—while the bee humming on as she gathers honey from flowers and the soft murmur of the waters and such other sounds of nature as accompany them—all combine to lull me to sleep.

142. *Homed thigh*—"Not strictly true to nature, as the bee does not carry the honey, but the pollen, on its thigh"—*Storl*.

That at her flow'ry work doth sing,  
 And the waters murmuring,  
 With such consort as they keep,  
 Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep.

145

143. *That at her &c*—The bee sings (hums) while she gathers honey from the flowers. *Her* is used for 'bee', the use of 'its' being not popular in Milton's time.

144. *Waters*: This, along with 'bee' above, is the nominative to 'entice' below.

145. *With such . . . keep*—With such other congenial sounds as accompany them.

145. *Consort*—harmony, sympathetic sounds (*see*). Other sounds of nature that accompany the humming of the bee &c., in which sense 'consort' is used concretely, Latin, *consors*, a partner.

146. *Dewy-feathered sleep*—sleep with dewy feathers, the god of sleep is represented as winged, shaking from his wings golden dews of slumber on all men.





And let some strange mysterious dream-  
Wave at his wings in airy stream

148

147-150. *And let some &c.*—a difficult passage :—

Masson takes 'his', as referring to 'sleep', and reads, it thus; "let some strange mysterious dream wave (*i. e.* move to and fro at his (Sleep's) wings in airy stream &c.' It is customary for poets to speak of Dreams as the messengers of Sleep (see Il P 1 10) here a dream is borne on the wings of Sleep and hovers over the poet in an airy stream of vivid images portrayed upon his mental eye.

The sense is And let some strange mysterious dream wave at the wings of sleep, with a stream of airy (unreal) figures displayed in lively portraiture (life-like shapes). Let some strange and mysterious dream wave at (*i. e.*, be borne upon) the wings of sleep, being displayed (appearing) in a stream of lively portraiture, and softly laid on my eye-lids. Let some marvellous and mystic dream float at the wings of sleep—being revealed in a visionary train of vivid pictures, and gently impressed upon my eye-lids. In plain English, let some strange dreams, revealing a series of vivid pictures or images be dreamt by me.

*Mysterious*—Unaccountable, incapable of any explanation

*Wave at*—Float at, be borne upon

*His wings*—The Wings of sleep. Some take *his* to refer to *dream*, but the difficulty then is with *wave at*, which implies floating at or hovering over something else, 'dream waving at its own wings' would be nonsense, therefore some have suggested that 'at' should be omitted, in which case the construction is simplified; 'Let some strange dream wave its wings, &c.' But the explanation given of *Wave at* = 'float', 'be borne upon' suits the context best, *his* referring to 'sleep' and not to *dream*.

Of lively portraiture display'd,  
 Softly on my eyelids laid , 150  
 And, as I wake, sweet music breathe  
 Above, about, or underneath,

149. *Of lively portraiture displayed*—revealed in a series of visions, or vivid images, appearing in a long train of striking and brilliant pictures.

*Any stream*—A train or series which is visionary or imaginary—like the images in a dream

*Lively portraiture*—Vivid images, striking, brilliant and life-like pictures.

The images in a dream are life-like—though visionary or unsubstantial.

*Displayed*—revealed, untolded,—refers to 'dream'.

150. *Softly laid*—And impressed gently on my eyelids—refers to 'dream'

The dream is gently pressed on the poet's eyelids—i.e. impressed on his mind & eye

151-154 *And as wood*—and let the sweet music such as angels, kindly-disposed to earthly men sing or the invisible spirit of the wood makes, fill the whole atmosphere up and down and all around, and gently wake me from the noon-day sleep

151. *Breathe*—a verb in the Imperative addressed to the goddess melancholy, as 'bring', 'hide' and 'let' above and, then the passage = Do, thou, O goddess 'breathe or diffuse sweet music &c. Some would take it as an infinitive, depending on 'let'. In that case, the line = let sweet music breathe through or permeate the whole atmosphere





Sent by some Spirit to mortals' good,  
 Or the unseen Genius of the wood  
 But let my due feet never fail  
 To walk the studious cloister's pale

155

153 *Spirit &c*—In this line, 'spirit' is to be pronounced as a monosyllable or there will a hypermetrical syllable.

*To mortals' good*—Propitious or well-disposed to human beings. 'Good agrees with spirit'. The sweet music, such as angels sometimes discourse for the benefit of base mortals out of kindness towards (*te*) as a mark of special favour to, men of the earth. None but men with pure heart can listen to such music, to those with gross unpurged ear this celestial music is inaudible.

154 • *Genius*—The guardian or presiding deity

155-156 *Let pale*—Let my feet which are *due* at, *te*, whose bounden duty it is to walk in, places of worship and learning never forget to walk within the precincts of buildings devoted to learning and religious worship, let me never forget to walk within the precincts of colleges and cathedrals—a duty which I owe them.

(*te*) Let me never fail in the duty of walking *along* the cloistered courts of colleges (such as those of Oxford or Cambridge) or cathedrals (like the Westminster Abbey or St Paul's).

155 *Due feet*—feet which are *due* at places of learning and worship: feet whose duty it is to walk places of, &c.

156 *To walk*—Used transitively, in the sense of 'to frequent'

*Studious cloister's pale*—The precincts of buildings devoted to study and learning and also to religious worship. *Pale*—limited space. *Cloister*, from Latin *claustrum* to shut an enclosed place (*te*) a place shut in by *pales* or wooden stakes. Hence it came to mean the covered passage on one side of a monastery or college.

The expression—"the precincts of some retirement which is devoted, or should be so, to study and learning, and also to religious services"—a University, or a Cathedral establishment. It has been suggested that Milton is here thinking of his old school, St. Paul's, close to the Cathedral, and that the high embowed roof and antique pillars may have been those of the adjoining Cathedral of (old) St. Paul's where his first aspirations after learning and reflection were experienced.

And love the high embow'd roof,  
 With antic pillars massy proof,  
 And storied windows richly dight,  
 \* Casting a dim religious light.

160

157. *And love &c*—The construction is "and let *me* love &c"  
*Embowed*—arched or vaulted, roof in the form of a bow of some Gothic Cathedral.

N. B. "Observe that the poet here passes from the cloister and that only at this point of the poem is *Penseroso* in contact with his fellow-creatures Throughout the rest, he is solitary" *Mason*

158. *With proof*—supported by old-fashioned pillars which are massive and therefore proof against, *i.e.*, able to bear easily the great weight of the stone-roof.

*Antic*—'antique', old-fashioned. *Antic* now means 'grotesque', 'odd'.

*Massy proof* = Massive strength (massive), (1) 'massy and therefore proof against the great weight of the stone roof' (2) 'proof against the mass or weight they bear'. This is the meaning when the two words are hyphenated, as in some editions. But 'massy' is an Adj., while in compounds with 'proof' a noun invariably precedes *e.g.* *water-proof*, *stain-proof* &c The first meaning is therefore preferable.

159. *Storied window*—Windows with stories from the scripture represented on their glass, windows painted so as to represent Scripture stories (cf. Gray "storied urn" 'Story' is an abbreviated form of 'history' the latter, being directly from Lat. *historia*, the other through the French. It has no connection with 'story' (= part of a house), which means something built (comp. *store*)

*Dight* = decked; Past participle of 'deck' see *L'Alleg* note 162,  
*Richly dight*—Gorgeously decorated.

160 *Casting &c*—casting a faint subdued light suited to a place of worship as tending to fix the thoughts on religion and devotion.

Dazzling light is not conducive to religious contemplation, as it distracts the mind from serious thoughts.

160. *Religious light*, such a light as is suited to a place of worship, and tending to prevent one's thoughts from being distracted, 'Religious,' like 'studious' (line 156), is a transferred epithet.





There let the pealing organ blow,  
 To the full voiced choir below,  
 In service high, and anthems clear.  
 As may with sweetnees, through mine ear,

164

161 *Pealing organ*—loud-sounding organ. The 'organ' is a *wind* instrument of music. If Gray's 'Pealing anthem'.

*Blow*—discourse sweet and solemn music—a verb denoting the action of wind instruments. Used in a semi-passive sense.

162. *To the full-voiced choir below*—*To*=*in* harmony with. The idea here is that the loud sounding organ should sound in harmony with the band of singers seated below the organ gallery, singing at their highest pitch. *Full-voiced*—with all the members of the choir singing in chorus, *Quire*—another form of *choir*, a band of singers in a church. (Lat. *choras*, a band of singers.)

*Below*—i. e., below the organ gallery.

163. *In service high*—During the performance of solemn devotional rites.

*Anthems*—devotional music, corrupted from Latin *anti fona*, a musical composition by choristers, different individuals singing different parts alternately, so that it hears as if one party responds to the other in song; hence, any kind of sacred music. *Clear*=sung clearly or distinctly, or it may mean 'pure' note;

164, *As*=(such) as, or, in such a way as.

164-166. *As may ..eyes*—that it may produce such a sweet, delicious effect on my ears as to throw me into a transport of joy and present all the glories of heaven before my mind's eye; i. e., enable me to enjoy heavenly or divine bliss.

Dissolve me into ecstasies, 165  
 And bring all Heaven<sup>s</sup> before mine eyes  
 And may at last my weary age  
 Find out the peaceful hermitage,

*Dissolve, ecstasies*--The line is highly poetical. The poet desires to hear music that will so melt his soul, so carry him out of himself, that he may almost learn the secrets of divine things.

*Dissolve*--melt. *Ecstasies*--Joys that carry one out of one's self, as it were, (I *ea*, out, and *sto*, stand), transport or raptures--such delights as would "take the imprisoned soul and lap it in Elysium"--*Comus*.

166 *Bring, eyes*--present all the beauties of heaven before my mind's eye--make me enjoy heavenly or divine bliss.

167-74 *And hermitage*--And I wish that I may find some quiet sequestered retreat in my old age when I shall be sick of the world and its ways.





The hairy gown and mossy cell,  
 Where I may sit and rightl<sup>y</sup> spell. 170  
 Of every star that heav'n doth show  
 And every herb that sips the dew,  
 Till old experience do attain  
 To something like prophetic stram  
 These pleasures, Melancholy, giv<sup>e</sup> 175  
 And I with thee will choose to live

169-74 *The strain*—and take to the rough, shaggy garments and the dark moss-covered retreat of the recluse where I may live to study with care and attention the stars of heaven and the herbs of the earth which are nourished by dew-drops till the experience gained by long years of study and research develop in me the prophetic powers of the sages of old.

*Hairy*—Coarse and shaggy *Rightl<sup>y</sup> spell of*—correctly study with care and attention like a beginner spelling his way through his lesson *Sips*—drinks imbibes, *it* is nourished by Cf. Pope's *Pastorals* "Every plant that drinks the morning dew" *Spell*—read slowly and thoughtfully *Of*—concerning *Attain*—reach Subjunctive after 'till' *Some strain*—Something like the powers of prophecy exercised by the wise men of old—the *rulers*—who were poets and prophets *Stram*—utterance

173-74 "There may be a reference here to the old astrologers who claimed the power of predicting events from the study of the stars, but such a power was not the ambition of Milton he rather means that wise experience of the aged, which enables them, through their knowledge of the past, to judge the probable results of different lines of action

175-76 *These live*—Let me have these delights and I will surely cast in my lot with thee—The student should observe that in the concluding lines there is no 'if'—as in those of the other poem—implying that there is no manner of doubt or uncertainty about the pleasures that Melancholy gives—clearly showing which side the poet's sympathies lay—viz that he preferred the penance to the mirthful temper



## **Prose rendering of IL PENSEROSO.**

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### **Lines 1-10.**

O useless, cheating pleasures of Mirth! which are always less in actual enjoyment than you seem in anticipation, and which are born of unmixed Folly as your mother, but have no father, go ye hence! How little do ye avail, help, or occupy with all your trifles, the settled, resolute mind of a person of fixed principles and character! Depart, and dwell in some thoughtless and besotted mind, and fill foolish fancies with gay and merry images as abundant and countless as are the lively, little particles of dust that dance up and down in the rays of sunlight coming into dark rooms, or as are most like unto floating, transitory, and wildly roving dreams,—the perpetually shifting followers of the God of sleep.

### **Lines 11-30.**

O thou most divine Melancholy, O thou wise and holy goddess, I wish thee health! Thy holy countenance is so transcendently bright that it cannot be clearly visible to the visual power of human eyes, and therefore appear, to the dull eyesight of us mortals, shrouded with black—the favourite colour of sober wisdom, but such a black as in men's estimation might become or be suitable to Hemera, the most beautiful sister of Prince Memnon; or to the paragon of beauty,

Cassiopea, the Ethiopian Queen, who was transformed into a constellation of 13 stars in the heavens, and who, having challenged the Nereids for the superiority of her or her daughter's beauty, so much annoyed their divinities as to incur their vengeance. But thou, O Melancholy! art of far more noble origin than ever Hemara or Cassiopea, for bright-haired Vesta, the goddess of fire, hearth, and civilization, was thy mother and Saturn was thy father. Though Vesta was Saturn's daughter, yet, there having been no great stigma attached to such a marriage as that of the father with his own daughter in the times of heathen mythology, he often visited her as a lover in faintly shining bowers, glades, and in the secret shaded woods of the most interior grove in Ida's cliffs, at a time before Jove or Jupiter rebelled against his father Saturn, or, in other words, before the golden age.

### **Lines 31-60**

O thoughtful, holy, pure, sober-minded, orderly, chaste, virtuous and pious recluse, Melancholy! Clothed all over with a majestic gown of violet shade of purple flowing with trails, and with a veil or hood of black crape linen becomingly cast or thrown over thy graceful shoulders, do thou come, but preserve thy accustomed dignity of movement with calm, uniform steps and thoughtful pace, and with looks holding intercourse or communion with Heaven, thy entranced soul being concentrated in thy eyes: Thy silently enraptured and ecstatic soul having been kept motionless in the holy transport of enthusiastic devotion to God, do thou abstract thyself from all earthly things till thou seemest a marble effigy, and till thou,

with a grave, dull, dejected and downcast bent, dost fix thy eyes, on earth as steadfastly as thy looks were before fixed on Heaven; do thou then take into thy company Calm, Peace and Quiet as well as lean and thin Moderation in food that feed on such unsubstantial food as angels live upon, and that hears the Muses forever sing in a circle round the altar and throne of God do thou also take into thy company retired Leisure that enjoys its pleasures in neatly adjusted gardens but, above all, do thou bring along with thee Divine contemplation—Him that soars on high on golden wing, guiding or conveying the fiery-wheeled throne of God, do thou also bid silence come with thee, by the signals she is wont to obey, unless the nightingale will condescend to give a song in her most melodious and melancholy mood, thereby softening the stern aspect of Night, while the Moon slowly drives her chariot drawn by dragons over the favourite oak of the nightingale.

### Lines 61-72.

O most melodious and melancholy nightingale! that avoidest the confused medley of sounds uttered by foolish mankind in the day-time, I court, walk and look for thee, O songstress, in order to hear thy evening songs, and not finding thee, I unseen walk on the dry new-mown meadow of the village green to see and watch the vagrant and erratic moon climbing to her highest point in the sky at night, looking like one who had deviated from the right way in the vast pathless skies and frequently having the appearance of positive descent and motion and bending through the woolly clouds, though in reality it is the

clouds that actually move and pass over the moon as they disperse around her.

### **Lines 73-102.**

On a plot of raised or elevated ground I often hear the curfew bell slowly ringing with a melancholy sound and as though coming along the shore over a vast sheet of water: or if the weather will allow, some quiet remote, solitary place will suit my purpose, when shining but not actually burning cinders give a sort of uncertain light, which can be described as neither light nor darkness; a quiet place which is far and free from all merry or jolly sounds except the chirruping or sharp creaking of the cricket on the floor of the hearth, or the drowsily uttered charms or magical verses of the watchman to avert multifarious perils of the night from the houses of the people dwelling within his beat or round; or, let me prosecute my midnight studies in a lofty solitary tower, by the light of my lamp which may be seen at a distance, (where sitting up till daybreak I may continue my nocturnal meditations even after the constellation of the Great Bear has ceased to shine, and may study the works of Hermes, the Egyptian philosopher, priest and king, all in one, and may hold communion with the departed spirit of Plato in order to be informed of the worlds or places where departed human souls go to after the dissolution of their bodies; as well as to be informed of the Spirits of Powers that preside over, or live in air, fire, water or under the ground and who are said to possess some sort of powers that work harmoniously with planetary and elemental influences.) Sometimes let me study the noble, classical Greek

tragedies in which heroic and kingly personages act with sceptres in hand and dressed in royal mantles, and of which the principal or only subject-matters are exploits and sufferings of Œdipus and Pelops and their royal houses, and of those various heroes who fought before the holy-city of Troy; let me also study those noble tragedies of more modern times, such as Shakespeare's Hamlet or Macbeth, which have dignified the tragic lore of comparatively more, modern times though their number is very few.

### Lines 102-130.

But, O Melancholy, I would that thy power could recover some of the mythic or ancient poems, such as the sacred hymns and oracles of Museus or of the most pathos-exciting Orpheus, which were perhaps the most pathetic and noblest of all that have come down to us, which could persuade the "iron god" Pluto, and even stern, horrid Hell to restore Eurydice to her lover, Orpheus. I also wish that thy power, O Melancholy, could call up or raise Chaucer from among the dead who left half-finished his 'Squires tale,' the story of bold Cambuscan, of his two sons Camball and Algarsife, and daughter, and of the knight who married the daughter Carnace who was presented with a gold ring, the possession of and wearing of which enabled her to understand the language of birds and the properties of herbs, and with a mirror which enabled the owner to foretell the future and to read secrets; and the story of the brass-horse of the Tartar king, which would very quickly carry the rider wherever he wished to go. I also wish, O Melancholy! That thy power could recover whatever else

such great bards as Boiardo. Ariosto, Spenser, Tasso and others have written on tournaments and trophies and on dismal enchanted forests, which writings have a two-fold meaning, or which, under the veil of romantic fictions, profess to convey moral and religious instructions.

### **Lines 121—154.**

Permit me to be often seen by thee, O Night, in thy pale course, till sober-hued or gravely attired Aurora appears, not dressed out in a gay manner or extravagantly curled or plaited as she was accustomed to have been when she went out hunting with Cephaulus, but having a mist or cloud becomingly arranged like a kerchief around her head, while winds moving to and fro, or shaking trees, ships, houses, &c are blowing shrill as from pipes or introduced with a quiet or gentle shower, when the strong wind has ceased ending with drops falling at short intervals from off the eaves on the rustling leaves. And when the morning sun begins to cast his fluttering rays, do thou bring me O Goddess Melancholy, to arched and embowered paths of glimmering groves where the light is as morning twilight, and to dark shadows of pines and long-lived majestic oaks of which the wood-god Sylvanus is fond, and where the cruel axe with uplifted stroke was never heard to terrify and drive away the oak-nymphs or dryads from their sacred retreats or places of resort. There, do thou, O Melancholy, hide me from the glaring sunshine in some closely covered grove situated near a rivulet where no profane eye may see me, while the bee, with thigh laden with honey, hums over her task among flowers and murmuring waters,

with such harmony as the bee and the waters maintain among themselves, and bring on angelic gentle sleep, the feathers of whose wings having been steeped in Lithean dew, let drops fall on the eyes of slumber and let some mysterious dream of lively portraiture displayed, move to and fro in airy stream on sleep's wings laid gently on my eyelids, and when I awake from sleep, let melodious music be uttered overhead, all around, and subterraneously, whispered to the pious ear alone, by some guardian spirit or by the presiding deity of the wood

### **Lines 155-166.**

But let my dutiful feet never fail to step at the right time into the enclosure of the secluded cloister or monastery devoted to learning, divine contemplation, or the discharge of religious duties, and to love the lofty-vaulted or arched roof supported by old-fashioned pillars unyielding to or able to resist super-incumbent weight, with windows painted with stories of Saints and histories of sacred events, and richly ornamented, emitting a faint subdued light which produces on the heart of the beholder an awful, religious feeling. And there in the Cathedral let the loud-voiced organ or any other instrument of church music be played in harmony with the choral singings of a whole body of singers sitting below and singing with full and rich voice, holiday church service and alternately-sung hymns such as may, with their sweet melody, through my external organ of hearing, melt my heart away into raptures of intense delight, and present before my mind's eye all the ideal pictures of angelic chorus with their heavenly delights.

**Lines 167-176.**

To conclude, the Melancholy man says .—" I wish that I, dressed in the hairy or coarse gown of hermit, may end my weary old age, in some tranquil hermitage floored with moss, or in a chamber of some monastery, whence I may carefully study the stars in the firmament, and the plants and herbs nourished by dews on the surface of the earth; until experience may give me a certain power of foretelling what is to happen. O Melancholy, give me these pleasures, and I will be glad to live with thee.

# Model Questions with Answers.

## L'Allegro and Il Penseroso .

[Important Questions are marked thus \*]

1—Q. Give a summary of Milton's life.

A John Milton, the greatest poet of his or any other age after Shakespeare, was born on December 9, 1608, in Bread Street, London—the second child and eldest son of a respectable Scrivener. He came, in his own words, *ex genere honesto*—of a family in which courage, nobility and love of art combined to whisper into his childish ears the most beautiful and eloquent words around his cradle. His life falls into three well-marked periods—

(1) *The First Period* (1608-40)—extends from his birth in 1608 over his education and travels to his return home from the Continent in 1660. While at Christ College, Cambridge, the strict propriety of his conduct together with the almost feminine amiability of his features got him the nick-name of the 'Lady of Christ.' He took his M. A. degree in 1632 and retired to his father's house at Horton for five years during which he prepared for the great work that lay before him, and wrote. (1) *The Ode on the Nativity of Christ*, (2) The sister poems of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, (3) The Pastoral elegy of *Lycidas*, and (4) The Masque of *Comus*.

(2) *The Second Period* (1639-60)—may be called the *Controversial* or *Prose* period of his life, in which the *poet* was lost in the *controversialist*. Excepting a few stray sonnets, he wrote in this period nothing but pamphlet after pamphlet on the burning, stirring political and theological questions of the time. His boldest work in this connection was the *Defensio Populi*—a vindication of the execution of Charles I. His greatest prose work, the *Arcopagitica*—a fervent appeal to the Long Parliament for the Liberty of the Press—belongs to this period. It was in this period too, about 1632, that he became blind owing to the excessive strain on his mental powers caused by his almost super-human intellectual work.

(3) *The Third Period* (1660-74)—is at once the darkest and brightest period of his life. Puritanism—the cause to which he had devoted his life—had fallen, and was followed by an era of moral and political profligacy inaugurated by the Restoration, which ill accorded with Milton's lofty and noble ideals. Milton himself had fallen, to use his own words, "on evil day's and evil tongues with darkness and dangers compassed round." He lived in the strictest seclusion, poor, blind and neglected,—but towering in the simple majesty and purity of life and thought above the gay minions of Charles II, like his own Samson among the ungodly Philistines, but though poor and blind, and 'thought extinguished quite', yet his inward eyes, illumined by the 'Heavenly Muse', 'in fine frenzy rolling' shone with a lustre truly divine—'out-shining myriads though bright'—and saw those sublime and heavenly visions which are the theme of his immortal epic—the *Paradise Lost*.

which appeared in 1667. *Paradise Regained*, a supplement to it, followed in 1671, and later on, the same year saw his sacred drama *Samson Agonistes*. He passed away 'with peace and consolation and calm of mind—all passion spent'—in 1674

**2—Q. Give a chronological list of Milton's works:**

- A. 1624. *Poetical Translation of Psalms* 114 and 136 . . .  
 1626 *Elegy on the Death of a Fair Infant*.  
 1629 *A Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*  
 1639 Some minor poems. *On the Passion* (i. e. death of Christ), *On Shakespeare* &c  
 1632 *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso*  
 " *Arcades*, a Mask enacted at Ludlow Castle  
 1634. *Comus*, also a Mask and acted at Ludlow Castle.  
 1637 *Lycidas*—a Pastoral Elegy on the death of his friend Edward King.  
 1639 *Epitaphium Damonis*—a Latin Elegy on the death of his friend.  
 1642 *Apology for Smectymnus*  
 1644 *Arcopagitica*  
 1651 *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*.  
 1658 *Paradise Lost* begun  
 1667 *Paradise Lost*, First Edition.  
 1670 *History of England*  
 1671 *Paradise Regained*  
 " *Samson Agonistes*  
 1672 *A Treatise on Logic*  
 1674. *Paradise Lost*, Second Edition.  
 1674. *Familiar Epistles* (in Latin)

**3—Q. Indicate briefly:—(1) Milton's character, (2) His Politics, (3) Religion and (4) The Style and Diction of his poetry.**

A. (1) He was the noblest champion of Puritanism in every sense of the term. His character was unexceptionable, his morals always pure, his religion deep-seated. He loved truth and virtue for their own sake with a genuine heart-felt love, and his belief in their final triumph was firm and unshaken to the last. He was in short the 'heroic Nazarite' of a world of ungodly Philistines.

(2) In religion he was what is called an anti-Trinitarian, *i.e.*, one who does not believe in the doctrine of Christian Trinity, holding the views of high *Arianism*, according to which Christ is regarded as a created being, perfect indeed, and superior to all other created beings, but not co-eternal and co-eternal with God.

(3) Though a royalist in his early youth, he became a staunch Republican with the out-break of the civil war.

(4) His style and diction is essentially Elizabethan, *i.e.*, marked by all those peculiarities of grammar and idiom which characterise those great masters of prose and verse who shed such a bright lustre round the maiden Queen. But he was a profound classical scholar and had so thoroughly assimilated the classical spirit of the great masters of antiquity that it has left its mark on almost every line of his poetry.

The chief features of his style are

(1) His classicism: (a) Imitation of Greek and Latin constructions, *e.g.*, the participial construction,

the dative, the omission of the antecedents; (b) the large proportion of classical words, *i.e.*, words of Greek and Latin origin used in their *literal* sense, *e.g.*, *admire abject, horrid, &c.*

(2) Elizabethan peculiarities, *e.g.*, the use of 'ed' for 'able', *past tense* for *past participle*, double negative for emphatic denial, *his* for *its*, *had* for *would have* &c

(3) Use of Italianised forms, *e.g.* *Sovran, serenade, &c.*

(4) Long and complicated sentences.

(5) Use of sonorous proper names

**4—Q.** Indicate briefly: (1) the date of composition, (2) the source or origin; (3) the form, and (4) the metre of *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso*.

A (1) Both these poems belong the *first* period of his life and were composed in 1632 at Horton, and printed in 1645

(2) It is generally supposed that the set of verses bearing the title 'the Author's Abstract of Melancholy,' prefixed to Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy,' and the famous song in Fletcher's 'Nice Valour' furnished Milton with the seed out of which sprang *Il Penseroso* and that, in turn led to *L'Allegro*. Sylvester Marlow and other Elizabethan poets also supplied verbal hints for several passages

(3) In form, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are *lyrics*, while *L'Allegro* also partakes somewhat of the character of a *pastoral*, so that it may be called a *pastoral lyric*.

Lyric Poetry literally means poetry of which the verses are sung in accompaniment with the *lyre*. It is essentially an expression of the individual emotions of the poet's mind—and its chief characteristics are elegance, smoothness, and gaiety. It is not necessary that in structure it should be as regular in all its parts as Didactic or Epic Poetry; but there must be parts which make up a whole, and a connection of these parts with one another. The transitions of thought may indeed be light and delicate such as are prompted by a lively fancy, yet they should be such as to preserve the connection of ideas, and show the author to be one who *thinks*, and not one who *raves*. It consists of *Odes*, which is a Greek word meaning a song or hymn (of which the verses used to be sung in accompaniment with the *lyre*) which are of 4 kinds (1) *Sacred*,—addressed to God, (2) *Heroic*, composed in praise of some Hero, and his exploits, (3) *Moral and Philosophical*, in which the sentiments are inspired by virtue, friendship, and humanity; and (4) *Festive and Amorous*, calculated merely for pleasure and entertainment.

*L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* belong to the 3rd class and form the best specimens of Lyric Poetry in English Literature.

✓ *L'Allegro* is also, as has been pointed out, in some measure a *pastoral*, which describes rural objects; and recalls to our imagination those gay scenes and pleasing views of Nature which are the delight of our childhood and early youth, and to which in more advanced years we fondly look back with pleasure.

This species of poetry has, in all ages and in all countries, been the delight of many readers and inspired

many writers and for this reason. *Nature* presents amidst rural objects the finest field for description, and nothing appears to flow more spontaneously into poetic numbers than rivers, mountains, meadows, hills, flocks, trees, shepherds void of care, &c. which the country alone can contain, and its great charm arises from the view which it exhibits of the tranquillity and happiness of country life. The *scene* is invariably laid in the country and the characters must be persons wholly engaged in rustic occupations, and must on no account deal in abstract reasoning, and still less in the points and conceits of affected gallantry, but *must speak the language of plain sense and natural feelings*.

(4) *The Metre* — “The first ten lines of each poem form a passage of invocation and the verses, though uniformly *iambic*, are of irregular length. Afterwards Milton adopts and adheres to *the simple four-foot rhymed couplet in which the iambic predominates*. Some of the lines have been pronounced *trochaic* rather than *iambic* and the following are quoted as examples.

“Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee  
Jest and youthful jollity.”

But the probable explanation of these verses is, that the first foot is formed of a single syllable, the scansion being thus

“Haste | thee, Nymph, | and bring | with thee |  
Jest | and youth | ful jol | lity.”

This is a familiar device with Chaucer whom Milton has here imitated.

\*5.—Q. What is meant by the title of each poem? Why  
 does Milton use these *Italian* words in preference to English  
 ones as the title of the two poems?

A. 'L'Allegro' (Lat. *alacer* brisk) means 'the cheerful man' and 'Il Penseroso' means 'the pensive or thoughtful man' (Lat. *Penso*, to weigh, reflect) Milton uses these Italian words, probably because they are more expressive of the characteristics of the two types of men he intended the poems to represent than their English equivalents 'Mirth' and 'Melancholy,' which, however, he uses in the body of the poems. Thus the idea of *alacrity* or *briskness* which is literally denoted by the title of 'L'Allegro' runs through the whole poem, e.g. *Haste* thee Nymph, &c." l. 25, "Come *trip* it" l. 33, "In *haste* her bower she leaves" &c, l. 87, "Out of door he *flings*", l. 113; and in many other ways *animation* and *buoyancy* are throughout indicated. The whole piece, too, is full of *sound*, as Prof. Bell points out, from the morning song of the lark to the whispering winds of evening,—from the merry bells of the 'upland hamlets' to the busy hum of men in towered cities.

Similarly, *Penseroso* (from the same root as *pensive*) avoids the association of gloom and ill humours which literally belongs to the word *Melancholy* (see Notes). The '*pensive*' man of Milton is not the Melancholic Cynic, the gloomy pessimist, sick of the world and its ways, always brooding over 'the ills that flesh is heir to'—but the man of calm, serene reflection—with the tranquil, contemplative mind of the *Rishi* of Ancient India or the Greek philosopher of old, drawing away from the sound and fury of the outside world, and finding in Solitude, Peace and Leisure the aids he

seeks to nurse his contemplation. We have therefore none of the briskness or alacrity of L'Allegro, none of its swiftness of action and movement, its play of sounds, its 'tripping' vivacity in *Il Penseroso* where things move more slowly, *action* being paralysed by *reflection*.

"It is evident that the respective characteristics of the speakers are by no means what we call *mirthful* and *melancholic*. There is nothing mirthful in our sense of the word in a wide landscape, there is nothing melancholic in reading Chaucer. Perhaps Milton felt that no two English words he could think of would serve him as titles and therefore adopted the Italian-words by which the poems are known"—Hales.

6—Q. Which of the two poems was composed first, and why?

A Though *Il Penseroso* comes after *L'Allegro* and would therefore naturally seem to be the later composition, yet it was, conceived, if not actually composed, first. The two poems which suggested to Milton the idea or theme of these pieces are in praise of Melancholy. Moreover, *Il Penseroso* is an exact picture of Milton's own life at Horton which was his ideal life, and from which he was only drawn away by the storm and stress of public events of the time. It is therefore quite probable and even natural that the picture so congenial to him was the first to fill his canvas.—Then, as a natural sequence he drew the opposite picture of the man of mirth. By a way of contrast—So "in all probability, Melancholy was the forerunner of Mirth. She was the first to cast her spell over Milton's fancy."

**\*7—Q.** "*L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*" are sister poems and so be properly understood, must be read together. Explain this remark.

A. The two poems are companion pieces—the one being the counterpart of, and at the same time a sort of complement to the other, the tastes and likings depicted in the one being sharply contrasted with those of the other. So they must be read together to be fully understood and appreciated (See Ans. to next question)

**\*8—Q.** Contrast the two poems.

A. *L'Allegro* celebrates the charms of Mirth, *Il Penseroso* those of Melancholy. The man of Mirth consigns Melancholy to the darkness of Hell and hails 'heart-easing Mirth' with all her jocund crew. The man of Melancholy dismisses 'all vain deluding joys' from his presence bidding them go back to the idle brains of fools—and hails melancholy with all her company. The former longs to hear the song of the lark and the crowing of the cock and to feast his eyes and ears with the bright, cheerful sights and 'sounds of morning'. The latter would fain listen to the nightingale in the evening and enjoy a quiet walk in the moonlight, and the pleasures of studying, in the deep solitude of midnight, poetry and philosophy and romance. The former delights in rural scenes and occupations in broad daylight. The latter loves the darkness and seclusion of the night as best suited to his tastes and pursuits;—a bright morning has no charm for him—he would rather prefer a cloudy and rainy morning, and some shady retreat in the mid-day where to repose in sweet slumber. The former likes to take part in the brilliant scenes of town life—in the pleasures of

the play and music. The latter would like to be awakened by sweet music from his mid-day sleep and listen to pealing organs in some Gothic cathedrals—and end his day in some quiet retreat in peace and happiness fathering wisdom

9—Q (a) What is the chief end or design of the poems?  
(b) What is Dr. Johnson's view of it?

A The chief end or design of L'Allegro is to show that true Mirth or Gaiety is the child of Nature and Spring—that cheerfulness is produced by the early freshness of Nature on a bright morning in Spring or Summer and it can be best enjoyed in the country, and in towns real Mirth is only to be found in the gay nuptial festivities, 'plays of Shakespear,' Johnson or some other master playwright and in Music.

That of *Il Penseroso* is that *Pensiveness or contemplation* is the offspring of Purity, Wisdom and solitude—that Peace, Quiet, and Leisure are the three chief aids—the best nurses of *contemplation* and Nature, the master minds of old, and the solemn music of the pealing organ in Gothic cloisters her chief delight and inspiration.

(b) Dr. Johnson, than whom a severer critic of Milton there never was is full of admiration for these two poems. Says he, "The author's design" is not merely to show how objects derive their colour from

the mind by representing the operation of the same things from the gay and the melancholy temper, or upon the same man as differently disposed, but rather how, among the successive variety of appearances every disposition of mind takes hold on those by which it may be gratified "

**10—Q** What is the plain meaning of the genealogy that Milton invents for Mirth and Melancholy?

A. See Notes.

**\*11—Q.** What two different types of character does Milton depict in these two poems?

" *L'Allegro* stands for the careless man who goes through life taking pleasures as they come avoiding its dark places, and never stopping to ask what it all means. *Il Penseroso*, on the other hand is the contemplative man in whom the tendency to reflect has paralysed the power or desire to act. For *L'Allegro*, life means pleasure—'joy in widest commonalty spread', joy in nature when 'she smiles and reflects his mood of content, joy in the sights and sounds of the fields; in witnessing the happiness of others; in fellowship with the world, in all amusements that gratify the eye with radiance of life and colour; in harmonies, that like the enchanted cup of Comus bathes the soul in bliss. It is life from the sunny side, the standpoint of a child. There is no trace of reflection,

no consciousness of aught being amiss in the world. With *Il Penseroso* reflection is the first word and the last, every road leads thither. The powers he invokes are Peace, Quiet and Leisure. His ideal day knows no kind of action. He finds solace in Nature but only when Nature will minister to his love of meditation. He turns to music of the solemn sombre kind that stimulates the mind and vouchsafes a revelation of what is beyond the world. His keenest pleasure lies in books that provide for him the lofty matter of reflection, illumine hard problems of Philosophy and bring him into communion with great thinkers. The one is always reflective—the other, never.

✓ 12—Q. Point out the relation of these poems to: (1) Milton's life, and (2) contemporary events.

A. Both the poems depict the two different phases of Milton's early life.

(a) *L'Allegro* depicts the pleasures of country life he enjoyed during the five years of his Horton life. There are unmistakable autobiographical references; in ll 70-80 "where the russet lawns and fallows gray" and the "meadows trim with daisies pied" are reminiscences of the fields of Horton, while the 'rivers wide' and 'the towers and battlements' allude to the Thames and Windsor Castle respectively.

*Il Penseroso* is decidedly Milton himself. It is a picture of the life he was leading at Horton—the life

of self-preparation for his great work. It represents indeed an ideal of culture and reflective enjoyment of life—but at the same time the ideal was realised in Milton's own life.

(b) *L'Allegro* has been supposed by some to typify the gay careless minions of Charles I whom the poet afterwards condemned more directly in Comus and his crew, while *Il Penseroso*, though not exactly representing the gloomy puritanic ideal, points to a middle course between the two great political parties into which the nation was being split up in Milton's times.

**'13—Q. Show how Coleridge's definition of poetry—the right words in the right places—is conspicuously true of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.**

A. "They possess the quality of verbal felicity which imprints fine poetry irresistibly on the memory—the words flow into a harmonious unity that nothing can dis sever. And this is shown by the fact that so much of the language of the poems has passed into the currency of everyday speech."

✓ **'14—Q. What is Milton's attitude towards Nature as shown in these poems?**

A. These two poems are the earliest examples in English literature of the poetry of genuine natural description. They show the poet's deep love of nature, which, however, is not with him as with Wordsworth, his 'all in all'. He is essentially a man of books and

sees nature with the eye of a scholar rather than of a scientific naturalist nor even of a close observer. We have therefore instances of untruthfulness to nature here and there. But this is hardly a fault with a poet like Milton with whom poetic truth is all in all (See notes)

15 — Q Speaking of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, Macaulay says — "These poems differ from others, as attar of roses differs from ordinary rose-water, the close packed essence from the thin-diluted mixture. They are, indeed, not so much poems as collections of hints, from each of which the reader is to make out a poem for himself. Every epithet is a text for a stanza." Explain and illustrate these remarks

A Macaulay means that these two poems are far more terse and compact than any other descriptive poem in the English language. A description which would occupy a whole stanza in an ordinary poem, has been compressed by Milton into a single epithet in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. It is for this reason that Macaulay compares these two poems to attar of roses, while likening the ordinary descriptive poems in the English language to ordinary rose-water. It is said that 150 ounces of rose leaves are required to prepare one ounce of "attar of roses", but no analysis will give any idea of the immense riches of description with which these two poems are crowded. There is hardly an aspect of external nature, beautiful or sublime, terrible or smiling, which is not expressed in them. sometimes as is ever the case in poetry of the

highest order, in an incredibly condensed form. There are many examples of a whole picture exhibited in a single word, stamped with one accurate expression, by a single 'stroke' Shaw says.—The *Allegro* and *Penseroso* have been justly called not so much poems as stores of imagery from which might be drawn materials for volumes of picturesque description. Like all Milton's works, admirable as they are in themselves, they are a thousand times more valuable for their peculiarly suggestive character—filling the mind, by allusion to other images, natural and artificial, with impressions of tenderness or grandeur "

As an illustration of the above criticism, the following well-known lines from *Il Penseroso* may be cited. (Macaulay calls them "the exquisite lines on ecclesiastical architecture and music ")

But let my due feet never fail  
To walk the studious cloister's pale,  
And love the high-embowed roof,  
With antic pillars masonry proof,  
And storied windows richly dight,  
Casting a dim religious light  
There let the pealing organ blow  
To the full-voiced quire below  
In service high and anthems clear,  
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,  
Dissolve me into ecstasies,  
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.—ll. 155, 166

## University Questions

ON

### *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso.*

(From different Calendars)

1. What is the exact meaning of the terms *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*?
2. Is Milton quite accurate in his use of the terms?
3. From what language are the words borrowed?
4. At what period of his life did Milton write the poems?
5. Compare the different moods represented in the poems.
6. Show how the circumstances of the one are in studied antithesis to those of the other.
7. What light does *Il Penseroso* throw on Milton's aim in life?
8. Milton is said to be in more perfect sympathy with one of these poems—Which is it? Illustrate your answer.
9. Show how the preference Milton declares in these poems to have for a life of contemplation affected his literary and political career.
10. Which of the two poems was written first?
11. What is the metre of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*?
12. Analyse the two poems and mark out the distinction there is between them in style, sentiment and simile.
13. "The influence of these two poems of Milton on later poetry is very remarkable." Explain this statement and illustrate your answer by references to other poets you may have read.
14. Show by an analysis that the poems are exactly parallel in structure.
15. Give a running story of '*L'Allegro*' and of '*Il Penseroso*'.

## 16. Explain:—

- |     |               |     |          |   |              |
|-----|---------------|-----|----------|---|--------------|
| (a) | "So buxom     | ... | debonair | " | l. 24, L'All |
| (b) | "The mountain |     | liberty  | " | l. 36,       |
| (c) | And every     |     | take     |   | l. 67,       |
| (d) | The Cynosure  |     | eyes     |   | l. 80, "     |
| (e) | With stories  |     | set      |   | l. 101-106 " |
| (f) | Such sights   |     | stream   |   | l. 129-130 " |

## 17. Scan:—

"To hear.....morrow" (ll. 41-46, *L'All.*)

18. "Straight mine eye .....rivers wide" (ll. 69-76 *L'All.*)  
Give a prose version of the lines.

19. Annotate. (a) And he..... not end (ll. 104-109, *L'All.*)  
(b) "That Orpheus...Eurydice (ll. 146-150 *L'All.*)

20. Write a critical note on, "If Johnson's...wood-notes wild."  
(*L'All.* 132-134.)

21. What are the allusions in "If Johnson's.....be on" (l. 152. *L'All.*) and explain what is meant by the line.

22. Give a prose version without the use of any metaphor of  
"And ever against.....harmony" (l. 135-144. *L'All.*)

23. To what dramatic poets does Milton allude in *L'Allegro* and in *Il Penseroso* and how far is his estimate of them just?

## 24. Explain:—

- |     |                |     |             |                       |
|-----|----------------|-----|-------------|-----------------------|
| (a) | The gay        | ... | sunbeams    | (l. 8. <i>Il P.</i> ) |
| (b) | That           | ... | queen       | (l. 19. ")            |
| (c) | Looks          | ... | skies       | (l. 39. ")            |
| (d) | Or let my lamp | ... | fleshy nook | (l. 85-92 ")          |
| (e) | So the time    | ... | stage       | (l. 97-109. ")        |
| (f) | The story      | ... | bold        | (l. 110 ")            |
| (g) | But            | ... | light       | (l. 155-60 ")         |

25. Give as many quotations as you can from *Il Penseroso*.

26. Annotate with special reference to the words in *italics*  
Where.....*ant* watch the Bear  
With *thrice great* *Hermis*, (ll. P. ll. 87-88.)

27. Write in prose

But let my due.....religious light (155-169, *Il P.*)

## 28. Give explanatory notes on—

Buxom l. 24, blithe l. 24, debonair l. 24, Cynosure l. 90, rebeck l. 44, junket l. 102, pomp l. 127, bested l. 3, demure l. 32, Priar's lanthorn l. 104, lubber land l. 110, antique pageamiry l. 128, Lydian airs l. 138, darkest grain l. 33, civil suited l. 122, dewy-feathered l. 146, dight l. 159, studious cloisters pale l. 155, high embowed roof l. 155, massy proof l. 155, Gorgeous Tragedy l. 97; Baskined Stage l. 102, Fantastic toe l. 34, Learned sock l. 132, Fancy's child l. 133, Stair'd Ethiop queen l. 19, The Cherub Contemplation l. 54, Out-watch the Bear l. 87, Thricegreat Hermes l. 88, The tale of Troy divine l. 106, Monumental oak l. 135.

## 29. Explain:—

- (a) Towers                      neighbouring eyes. (ll 77-800 L'Al.)  
 (b) Sometime let                      ... stage (ll 99-102 Il.P.)

30. What references are there in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* to Shakespeare?

31. What grammatical peculiarities do you find in *Milton's* writings? Comment on his use of the possessive case of *it*; and illustrate with quotations from your text.

Ans.—(See notes Il P. ll, 138.)

32. Explain:—*'Milton's Mythology is more Greek than Christian.'*

33. Show from a consideration of the spirit of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* in what respects Milton was at variance with the religious party to which he belonged; and illustrate your answer by quotations from both poems.

34. Quote passages from your text showing that Milton was not an ardent student of Nature.

35. Show how a study of the two poems would impress on the reader the idea that Milton had a great taste for music.

36. Compare *L'Allegro's* portraiture of Melancholy with that of *Penseroso*?

37. Explain:—*'Milton's life is a drama in three acts.'*

38. Why did the poet choose the Italian expressions for the titles?

39. Explain fully with reference to the context and annotate where necessary.—

(a) When in one night, ere glimpse of morn,  
His shadowy flail both threshed the corn  
That ten day-labourers could not ead,

(b) Such sights as youthful poets dream  
On summer days by haunted stream.

(c) Untwisting all the chains that tie  
The hidden soul of harmony,

(d) And every shepherd tells his tale  
Under the hawthorn in the dale

(e) With store of ladies, whose bright eyes  
Rain influence, and judge the prize  
Of wit or arms.

(f) Then to the well-trod stage anon  
If Jonson's learned sock be on,  
Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child  
Warble his native wood notes wild.

(g) Where glowing embers through the room  
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom,

(h) And let some strange mysterious dream  
Wave at his wings in airy stream  
Of lively portraiture displayed,  
Softly on my eyelids laid,

(i) But let my due feet never fail  
To walk the studious cloister's pale  
And love the high embow'd roof,  
With antic pillars massy proof,

40. Annotate upon, and explain the allusion in, the following.—

(a) She was pinch'd and pull'd, she said,  
And he by friar's lanthorn led,  
Tells how the drudging goblin sweat,  
To earn his cream-bowl duly set,

Such strains as would have won the ear  
Of Pluto, to have quite set free  
His half-regained Eurydice.

- (c) And therefore to our weaker view  
 O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue,  
 Black, but such as in esteem  
 Prince Memnon's sister might bescem,  
 Or that star'd Ethiop queen that strove  
 To set her beauty's praise above  
 The Sea Nymphs, and their powers often
- (d) Or let my lamp at midnight hour  
 Be seen in some high lonely tower,  
 Where I may oft out-watch the Bear  
 With thrice-great Hermes, or unsphere  
 The spirit of Plato, to unfold  
 What worlds, or what vast regions hold  
 The immortal mind, that hath forsook  
 Her mansion in this fleshly nook
- (e) Or call him up that left half told  
 The story of Cambusian bold,  
 Of Camball, and of Algarsife  
 And who had Canace to wife  
 That own'd the virtuous ring and glass,  
 And of the wondrous horse of brass,  
 On which the Tartar King did ride,

41. Compare natural description as in the *L'Allegro* and *Penseroso* with natural description from the point of view of Cowper or Wordsworth

42. What is the exact meaning of the terms *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*? Does Milton use them rightly? In these two poems Milton declares his preference for a life of contemplation; shew how the preference affected his literary and political career.

43. What is the exact meaning of the terms *Lyric Poetry* and *Elegiac Poetry*? Show how these two classes of poetry resemble each other and how they differ

44. "Milton's attitude towards nature is not that of a scientific naturalist nor even that of a close observer."

Discuss this criticism, and show by references to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* what was Milton's attitude towards nature.

45. Illustrate by quotations from the poem Dr Johnson's remark that even in *L'Allegro* he found "some melancholy in his mirth"

46. Account for Milton's habitual employment in his poems of the fictions of pagan mythology.

47. Quote lines from *L'Allegro* or *Il Penseroso* illustrating the following, —

(a) The green leaves quiver in the cooling wind  
'And make a chequered shadow on the  
ground — *Titus Andronicus*

(b) Against the eastern gate of Paradise.  
Levelled his evening rays — *Paradise lost*,  
Bk. iv.

(c) Then our fancy of itself bereaving  
Dost make us marble with too much concerning. —  
*Milton's Epitaph in Shakespeare*,

48. What is meant by 'Pathetic Fallacy'? Quote instances from *L'Allegro* or *Il Penseroso*

Ans — See II P. l. 8 &c.

49. What is meant by Hypallage? Quote instances from *L'Allegro* or *Il Penseroso*.

As. — See *L'Allegro* l. 28, *Il Pens.* l. 107, 121, &c.

50. Compare *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, with reference to the cheerful or grave effects produced by sound upon the hearer.

51. At what period of his life did Milton write the poems bearing the titles of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*? What is the meaning of these words, and from what language are they borrowed?

52. Give the derivation and original meaning of the words *frolic*, *buxom*, *blithe*, *debonair*, *demure*, *cynosure*, *rebeck pomp*, *bout*, *bested*, *junkit*; and explain what is meant by the phrases 'Saturnine rule,' 'antique pageantry,' 'darkest grain,' 'Lydian airs,' 'Civil-suited,' 'rain influence.'

53. What do you understand by Milton's *Latinism*? Quote instances from *L'Allegro* or *Il Penseroso*

54. In what peculiar sense does Milton use the following words:—*sale*, *uncouth consent*, *fond*, *secure*, *matin*, *pomp*, *influence*, *shapes*, *commercing*, *cunning*, *virtuous*, *triumph*.

55. Explain the allusions in the following passages:—

a. If Jonson's learned sock be on.

b. That starred Ethiop queen who strove  
To set her beauty's praise above

- N. B.—The answers to all these Questions will be found in our Introduction, Foot notes and "Model Answers."







